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THEOLOGY IN THE SOCIO-MISSIONAL
CONTEXT OF INDIA

THE ADVENTURE OF THEOLOGY TODAY

John B. Chethimattam

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INDIC THEOLOGICAL SERIES

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The Meeting of Religions

**THEOLOGY IN THE SOCIO-MISSIONAL
CONTEXT OF INDIA**

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Editorial

Every one knows that Vatican II radically altered the nature, approach and method of theological thinking current before the Council. Most of the drafts prepared by theologians and specialists for the documents of the Council were thrown out by the Fathers of the Council as unintelligible and irrelevant to the times. Even during the Council theological thinking evolved as is evident from the difference between *Lumen Gentium*, the dogmatic constitution on the Church, and *Gaudium et Spes*, the pastoral constitution on the Church in the Modern World. Still, if we go through the handbooks and curricula of our theological seminaries very little change has taken place in them. The same old scholastic method of approach continues and the treatises are the same. This outmoded method and the unintelligible philosophical idiom in which the doctrines of faith are presented have reduced seminary theology into an uninspiring academic requirement for graduation and priestly ordination. The great many theological courses provide plenty of information, but are not formative of real men of God. If the spokesmen for the church are not truly inspired by the faith of the Church they fail to inspire the people. A pious spiritual formation through spiritual discourses little rooted in current theology and the many devotions and external discipline cannot make up for the absence of solid theological nourishment.

This gradual de-theologizing of theological schools is compounded and accelerated by the pretended scholarly neutrality which still dominates the study of Scripture in our seminaries. It is mostly based on an ideological pre-understanding which simply seeks to legitimize the status quo of

society. "Scholarly exegetical interest and the hermeneutics which guides it (rather than the formal method as such), are directed unilaterally to the acquisition of authoritarian knowledge in the service of an elitist claim to dominance on the part of the few 'reading experts' in the church. Exegesis has thus become in large measure a legitimating science, and authentic exegesis has turned into ideology." Effort is concentrated upon taking the student of the Bible back to the biblical times and their culture than on making those books of Scripture relevant and meaningful to our times. This can profit only the specialist not the ordinary believers who want to read the Gospel as a contemporary document. The task of true hermeneutics is to liberate a text from its original cultural context and bring it down to our own cultural situation. To be relevant to modern theological thinking biblical theological scholarship should develop a paradigm for biblical revelation that does not understand the Bible as an archetype, but as a prototype. An archetype is an unchanging timeless pattern, while a prototype is open to the possibility of its own transformation. This cannot be accomplished as long as the manuals of biblical interpretation placed in the hands of our students are products of western scholarship.

Moral theology is another branch of theological studies that seems to run independently of theological principles. For a long time now it has been only a glorified "ethics" using only a few stray Scriptural quotations to corroborate otherwise evident conclusions for moral behaviour mostly drawn from the ethics of Aristotle and other Greeks. This moral theology is very useful for dealing with the ethical problems of the people, distinguish clearly right and wrong, virtue and vice, good and sinful actions and the like. But it does not give any clear idea of Christ's moral message to the world, that all humanity is a new creation in Jesus Christ, that we have a common history and a common destiny, and that our moral task is not merely to do good and avoid evil, but primarily to build up all human beings into the one family of God with a specifically Christian way of life and thought pattern, and to make this world hospitable

to all God's children: "If your justice does not exceed that of the scribes and pharisees — who were very faithful observers of the law — you will not enter into the Kingdom of heaven! The point of departure for moral theology in seminaries today is the reality of one's own self and the nature of the human action, its orientation to happiness and other standards and values, and not as Dietrich Bonhoeffer has demanded in his Ethics, "the reality of God as he has revealed himself in Jesus Christ" (p. 8). If our moral theology has to be an integral part of our Christian message, it has to start with an anthropology in the light of Christ. Stress the priority of faith over all works, show the fecundity of faith bearing fruit in love and justice, and make clear the specifically Christian understanding of creative liberty and fidelity.

In this post-Vatican II period the most exciting subject in our seminaries is Liturgy. Great effort is being made in the spirit of the Vatican decree on divine worship to bring liturgy out of the post-Tridentine rigid ritualism, make it more relevant to the life of the people and give them an active and meaningful participation in it. But the case has been far different in this matter in the Syro-Malabar seminaries. The one aim of liturgists here is restoration, take the liturgical texts back by centuries to their so called ancient purity, with no thought whatever to make them relevant and intelligible to the people. A result of this frantic effort at "restoration" has been to create an unhealthy split among bishops, clergy and people and produce a group of priests fanatical about certain peripheral aspects of Christian life and worship and somewhat oblivious about its essential obligations. This is surely a distortion of priorities. Liturgy is only the expression of faith, namely its cultic celebration. In fact Christianity did not start with a new liturgy but with a new faith which reinterpreted the Jewish worship giving it a new meaning centred in Christ. To speak of a golden age of the liturgy in the past is an illusion. As faith evolves and finds new expressions with the contributions from the experience of

believers guided by the Spirit, liturgy also has to change to be a true reflection of faith.

It is clear that there is something radically wrong about our theological formation. We have been discussing this now for a long time. A whole seminar was conducted in October 1978 at the Divine Word Seminary, Pune, on "Theologizing in India". The papers presented in that seminar were published in book form in 1981. Indian Theological Association year after year in its annual meetings gave out statements calling for a radical revision of our theological curriculum and theological orientation. But no significant change has taken place so far. But the only reasonable approach is to keep crying for change with the hope that some one some where will be listening. So this issue of *Jeevadhara* is devoted to a discussion about contextualizing the Christian theology in the social, missionary and interreligious situation of India today. With this in view a circular was sent to a number of our leading theologians and a number of missionaries were personally interviewed, regarding the type of theology we have to teach in the seminaries and the priorities to be kept.

Answers were received from a great number of them both through letters and personal conversations. These answers under the title "Theology in our Seminaries" form the substance of this issue. The first article presents a short survey of the evolution of theology down the centuries and its main post-Vatican orientations. The second article is on "The Future of the Church' Mission in India" by M. Amaladoss, where the focus is on what the Church today could and should do for India in view of the Kingdom, rather than what it should do for itself, which latter has to be determined in the function of its wider mission to the whole people of India. The last article by R. Panikkar is an Introduction to the *Indic Theological Series* of monographs launched by the Indian Theological Association after long and mature meditation and discussion.

The Adventure of Theology Today

The Modern Challenge

Today theology is an adventure. There are no set rules nor definite models or standards to follow. Vatican II was a high point of theological activity, period of an ideal co-operation between theologians and bishops. The documents of Vatican II were the fruit of intense theological activity that was going on for over fifty years in the fields of ecclesiology, liturgy, divine revelation and the like. But in Vatican II the old theology died and a new theology began only in its barest rudiments. Even in the very course of Vatican II sharp changes in theological perspective could be easily discerned. Even after a quarter of a century from the Council the uncertainty and hesitation in theology continues. There is a burning need for a theology that makes the gospel relevant for our age and country, our people, their aspirations and their needs.

The call of universality and particularity

Theology is not an ideology nor a global vision according to which we have to refashion the whole world. The irrelevance of our theology today comes mostly from the fact that it appears to be conclusions from an ideology or philosophy which has long lost its relevance. The task of theology is more modest. It is the community's reflection on what God said and did in the past history of humanity, on the relevance and meaning of that divine revelation to the community's experience, a critical examination of its beliefs, social, political, economic and cultural structures and institutions. This theological reflection seeks to make the community more deeply rooted in faith and more authentically human. So there cannot be a global theological vision or universal theology for all peoples and all seasons.

If the Church is the People of God present in all nations and works for a king to whom the nations were given for inheritance, in virtue of that catholicity all parts should contribute to the Church (L.G. 13) and make her message relevant for each particular context. The community gathered around the Eucharistic altar seeks to make the deposit of faith meaningful and effective for its members to build them up in Christ at the same time as maintaining a dynamic communion with other communities scattered all over the country and all over the world. Hence the actual task of theology is to make the universal message of salvation proclaimed by Christ for all human beings relevant for the closely knit community here and now with its immediate problems and, besides, explain and express the relevance and meaning of its experience bound in space and time, to the universal vision of faith.

Growing irrelevance of theology

If we go through the hand-books of our seminaries we can easily see how little change has taken place in them even a quarter century after Vatican Council. The purely theoretical framework of courses, reliance on theological books, especially those imported from abroad, the minimal input received from the actual context and the strange philosophical systems and ideas in which the theological discourse is conducted explain why theological courses have become increasingly irrelevant as far as the formation of persons are concerned. During the last forty years theology had only an ever decreasing impact on the minds of people. Even in seminaries authorities are relying less and less on theology to achieve the formation of seminarians. They have recourse to other means like pious exhortations, devotional exercises and external rules of discipline to achieve this. Even liturgy is more or less completely divorced from theology and made into an exercise of piety.

The danger of such a purely abstract and theoretical treatment of theological subjects is not only that it is irrelevant to life but also that it imposes on minds the ideology of the dominant culture pretending to present a

complete picture of man and of his place in the world. There is no place for all the new discoveries, the socio-economic and political informations, problems and issues that keep coming up everyday, since they are all supposed to be already included in and resolved by the global vision. No wonder the traditional theologian is incapable of reading the signs of the times and listening to the voice of the Spirit speaking through concrete situations and individual persons.

What actually took place is as Dean Ronald F. Thieman of the Harvard Divinity School said in his inaugural address, a de-theologizing of theological schools. Among the four traditional subjects that constituted the theological curriculum, Scripture, history, systematics and pastoral, a certain disintegration took place. Scripture and history became independent specialized disciplines becoming increasingly technical and narrowly focussed. In order to gain or retain academic respectability they borrowed methodological insights from cognate fields, but in the process came to give the impression of a "secondary" quality. Pastoral studies, on the other hand, became technique-oriented and borrowed heavily from the related professional fields of communication or psychology or business administration, thereby losing their theological and religious aim and rationale. Theology itself cut off from Scripture and tradition and the pastoral goal became irrelevant speculation for its own sake.

I. New Opportunity for Theology

Modern world is in a desperate situation craving for a message of hope from the God of salvation. In the present universal situation of conflict and struggle, injustice, violence and disregard of basic human rights, life itself is trivialized. As Jurgen Moltman says: "The swift change of external circumstances, the revolutionary progress in science and technology, and a simultaneously growing threat through social, military and ecological conflicts have disseminated a feeling of general insecurity among many people in our society."¹ Man is no longer standing in awe and

¹. *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, London, SCM, 1977, p. xiii.

fascination before a divine mystery but desperately looking for conversion, and reconciliation with fellow human beings in the search for wholeness. Faith is no longer felt as an escape into one's privacy for the elimination of personal sin and the attainment of the salvation of one's soul. It has become a collective search for the meaning of humnaity itself and of the world. Individual is no longer isolated, but culturally and psychologically bound with other human beings in a net work of social relationships. This is the context in which the Gospel calls for repentence, and return to the authenticity of man is given by the incarnate Son of God.

The crucified Christ is no longer a mystery and a scandal, but the common experience of humanity waiting for redemption by the resurrected and exalted Christ. The ambiguity of human experience of joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties,especially of the poor and the afflicted, calls on the faith of the believer to see in it the image of the crucified Lord, which in contrast raises the vision of the heavenly consummation. The Son of Man, the Son of David crushed in the dust of human suffering and humiliation is the same one called to sit in glory on the right hand of the Almighty. To raise this vision of hope for the modern world in the midst of meaningless strife and despair is the task of theology today.

But it is not an abstract and purely ideological theology but one fully rooted in the context of modern life, pointing the finger at the real evils, failings and sins of man and calling for action according to the dynamics and dialectics of God's dealings with humanity. The model of this theology is found in the Book of Genesis. There a theologian looking millennia back to the origins of humanity sees the image of human sin depicted by the disobedience of the first parents, the fratricide of Cain, the corruption of the world at the time of the deluge, and the pride and presumption of the people of Babel, on the one hand, and, on the other, the divine initiative of human salvation in the primeval establishment of order and law, the constitution of the covenant, promise of salvation and eschatological

liberation. There is contextual theology in the prophetical utterances of the prophets of the Old Testament, who on the one hand take the people to task for their injustices, violations of God's covenant, predict the imminent punishment from God, and, on the other hand promise eventual liberation and salvation by the hand of the same God.

From the pastoral church to the people's church

The dramatic change that has taken place today is a shift from the pastoral Church of bishops and priests who look after the people, to the people's own Church among the people, as Jurgen Moltmann has stated: "It is felt to be the responsibility of the community of all believers to proclaim their faith at a time of crisis and give the reason for their hope when they are questioned." (1 Pet 3:15) The true people of God have to be open to God in trust and fidelity to the faith they have received. It is at the same time under obligation to men to proclaim God's saving word to all humanity in Jesus Christ (Rom 1:14). It has also to be open to the future by its commission in hope to interpret the present tribulations as the birth pangs for the emergence of God's Kingdom. So theology cannot remain the intellectual pastime of a few theologians but has to be the ongoing proclamation of the threefold openness of the believing People of God In the words of Ronald F. Thieman, today theology has to do "a communal, formative and critical activity that can serve as the integrative factor" for the whole community (l. c. p.8).

The missionary situation

Another factor that broadens the vision of theology is the call to mission work. Theology of mission is a new arrival in the field of theology, and even today it is not properly developed. Vatican II did not have a clear theology of evangelization but only a juridical blue-print for a programme of mission work. Even the special Roman Synod that was called to discuss the mission, failed to come up with a unified vision of evangelization. What has come out clearly is that mission is not a function of the Church but the Church itself a function of the mission. Evangelization is not a particular section of theology but theology

itself is an aspect and articulation of our understanding of mission for evangelization. The mission of Christ creates the Church, and it is from the mission and in the light of the mission that the Church has to be understood. Our theology as the understanding of the faith of the community has to be spelt out and developed, according to our mission in the world, to proclaim the good news of salvation. The preaching of the Gospel is not addressed only to the Christians, to strengthen their faith, but to non-Christians as well calling them to embrace the truth. So only an interreligious theology, an interpretation of faith that can be grasped by Christians and non-Christians alike, can satisfy the demands of the mission. The spiritual and charismatic gifts are not restricted to the pastors of the Church nor to the Christians either. St. Peter discovered at Caesarea that his listeners received the gifts of the Spirit even before they became the members of the visible Church. The all-embracing mission corresponds to Christ's messianic mission into the world and to the sending of the Spirit "poured out on all flesh". Hence theology is challenged today to be an on-going meditation of the people of God in response to the "movement from God in which the Church has its origin, and arrives at its own movement, but which goes beyond the Church, finding its goal in the consummation of all creation in God" (J. Moltmann, l. c., p. 11).

Ecumenical orientation

What urges the Catholic theologian to get out of his parochialism is the ecumenical situation which has gone beyond the stage of dialogue among different Christian Churches. They are no longer comparing notes on different points of faith, but looking to the common source of their faith in Christ. "We need increasingly to realize that the separate histories of Churches find their full meaning only if seen in the perspective of God's dealings with his whole people", declared the Third World Conference on Faith and Order held at Lund, August 15-25, 1952 (ed. O Tomkins, SCM, 1953, p. 15). Today the Churches are called upon to reflect on the common heritage received from

Christ, their common mission to proclaim the Gospel and to work together to build up a new world. Even though an all-Christian Ecumenical Council to help Christianity speak with one voice is still a mere Utopia, as Jurgen Moltmann says, today the divided Churches have begun to live in council with one another. The Catholic Church is the communion of individual Churches with their different traditions going back to antiquity and forming one tradition of faith received from the Apostles. Non-Catholics also admit that even though there are different Churches there can be only one tradition of the Church. Otherwise they would not be Christian Churches but different religions. So the present challenge for Christian Churches is to theologize in communion.

II. The Historical Pilgrimage of Theology

Theology has a long and varied history. It was not always understood in the same sense and down the centuries it has improved and deepened its own self-understanding. Christianity is the mystery of redemption brought about by God and communicated to us through the sacraments, and also inwardly and personally through testimony of the Spirit in the grace of faith. The Holy Scripture including both the Old and New Testaments is as it were 'the covering letter' of the mystery of faith and life communicated to us². Comparing the faith of the living Church with its norm in the life and testimony of the apostolic Church and in the written Scriptures, there is the basic need to make that faith itself intelligible and relevant to the living context. According to the famous and oft-quoted testimony of St. Augustine, "Everything that we need for our life of faith and our moral life can be found in what is stated explicitly in Scripture."³ Still a 'covering letter' cannot be given an absolute value but has to be interpreted in harmony with the living experience of faith.

Apostolic and post apostolic theologizing

The Evangelists and the other New Testament writers were

2. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Revelation and Theology*, London: Sheed & Ward, 1979, p. 14.

3. *De Doctrina Christiana* II, 14. PL 34, 42.

engaged in a theological activity, an interpretation of their post-Resurrection experience of faith in Christ. They were not reporting the exact words of Christ nor writing a chronicle of the events nor writing a biography of Christ. Once they had grasped the messianic character and redemptive mission of Christ after he rose from the dead, they were witnessing to what he said and did during his public ministry and after the resurrection as the testimony of their own faith and conviction. But since this testimony was addressed to a particular living community with its own socio-cultural and political context and its own specific problems they were also doing theology: they were presenting the data of revelation communicated to the community so as to relate them to its communitarian existence.

St. Luke, perhaps, provides the best example of Christian theology at this stage. As a writer of the post-Apostolic age deeply rooted in the spirituality of the Old Testament, especially Isaiah and the psalms⁴, Luke uses early Christian text as sources for his own gospel. He is faithful to the Kerygma enshrined in the tradition, to its spirit, rather than to its letter. As Helmut Flender⁵ says, for Luke "Tradition is something that can be reshaped, and Luke deals with it very freely. For the transmission of tradition is something that occurs on the human level within history. But on the spiritual plane he contrives to preserve the thread of continuity in the witness of Christ. He adapts his message to his own age. But it is the same Christ to whom he bears witness. It is this fidelity to the underlying spirit that gives him the human freedom with which he shapes it. In this healing and liberating message to the 'poor' what he has in mind is Israel, the poor deprived of their wealth by the rich, of Isaias 3:15, the oppressed Israel languishing in captivity in Babylon (Is 40-55) and the wronged poor of Is 61:1. Still his message is universal. in his theological vision he brings into focus: (1) the power-laden presence of God in the midst of his

4. See David Peter Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor in Luke Acts*, Linz, 1982.

5. *Luke Theologian of Redemptive History*, tr. Fuller, London; SPCK, 1967.

people, (2) the immediate ingestion of his Kingdom in the actual situation of poverty and injustice, (3) the authority of Jesus as God's spokesman, (4) the polarisation of conflict among the residents of Israel, i.e., the apostles who are sent and the people to whom the message is addressed (Lk 10:1-16), (5) the reality of heaven as both immediately and ultimately significant, (6) the vital role played by the Holy Spirit providing the contact between the invisible and visible realms, (7) the wider warfare between God and satan — Jesus and demons, and (8) the continuation of the work of the prophets and kings, by the delegates of Jesus⁶.

Theologizing in the greek world

Once the Christian Gospel presented itself to the Greek World it had to encounter an entirely different cultural situation imposed by Hesiod and Homer, Plato and Aristotle. Against the multitude of gods and goddesses of the Graeco-Roman world, Paul had to argue that they could not be either real mediators or saviours since they were not really divine nor human and that the only mediator and saviour was Jesus Christ, true God and true man. In the context of the diverse forms of logos and pneuma John showed the unique personality of Christ, the Logos, and of the one Divine Spirit. But when people like Justin, Tatian, Clement and Origen tried to use Greek philosophy as a tool to interpret Christian faith they created a trend of thought that ended up in compromising the divinity of the Logos and of the Spirit which were fundamental to the Christian understanding of human salvation. The Christian theologians of the age had to spend much energy in counteracting the errors produced by theologizing that faith lost in theology itself.

After that traumatic experience of the Trinitarian and christological controversies the rational task of theology was reduced to apophatism, the negative description of what God is not, rather than what God is. For Pseudo-Dionysius an unknown writer of the 5th century, theology

6. See S. Minear, *To Heal and to Reveal, The Prophetic Vocation according to Luke*, New York; Seabury, 1976.

was Scripture, theologia, the divine utterances. If there are difficulties and apparent contradictions in Scripture, they are a warning that man should not remain precccupied with the lower details of faith but rise higher. Of course, knowledge is what divinizes and unites, and ignorance only does divide and destroy. But the theology which provides positive knowledge is mysticism. So most of the patristic writing is focussed on fighting the errors, explaining the sacraments to the catechumens and initiates and providing the commentaries on various books of the Bible.

Emergence of scientific theology

Theology emerged as an academic subject in the 12th century when scholastics tried to apply to the interpretation of Biblical texts the scientific method of classical disciplines of grammar, rhetoric and especially dialectic. Thereby a new science of theology with a strict definition of its method and content, emerged. The object of this study was the *sacra pagina* or biblical texts. Applying strict method of interpretation of classical texts of Homer and other poets and the writings of Plato which was prevalent in schools, it tried to bring out the real meaning of Scripture. To confirm this meaning of Scripture appeal was made to the authority of the Fathers of the Church and ecclesiastical writers like Augustine, John Damascene, Dionysius the Areopagite and Boethius. Their opinion was supposed to be unanimous and constituted the norm for orthodox teaching. What was looked for was not the originality of a Father's teaching as an interpreter of faith but agreement with other authorities constituting the common witness to the Church's faith. So when Peter Abelard (1079-1142) pointed out the diversity of patristic opinion on a variety of doctrinal points and presented himself for his personal talents as an authority, it added a special reason for his condemnation in the councils of Soissons and Sens. He was actually challenging the traditional scope of theology as bringing out the message of faith from Scripture and the unanimous testimony of tradition of the Church rather than presenting a rational interpretation of it. When St. Anselm defined theology as "faith

seeking understanding", and presented a project for a rational interpretation of faith, his confrere and predecessor in the episcopate, Archbishop Laufranc, pointed out its dangers and dissuaded him from such a project. But Anselm went ahead with his rational meditation on faith in his *Monologion* and *Proslogion*, though eyebrows were raised in many quarters about his new venture. When John Scotus Eriugena tried to interpret faith in the light of the philosophical insights of Ps. Dionysius the Areopagite his theological rationalism met with stiff opposition from ecclesiastical authorities and he escaped excommunication and incarceration only on account of the royal patronage he enjoyed.

Theology as rational interpretation

Introduction of Aristotle into western Catholic universities even against strict ecclesiastical prohibitions, constituted the turning point in the history of theologizing. The unanimity of the opinions of the Fathers on all doctrinal matters was long ago exploded. Texts from the writings of the fathers could be easily quoted on both sides of a controverted question. So the question was how to make faith intelligible with the help of rational philosophy which was the handmaid of theology. If Aristotle's *Analytics* and *Rhetoric* could be used to bring out the real meaning of revelation why not use his metaphysical system to make the revealed truths intelligible and appealing to human reason. The *Sentences* of Peter Lombard which became a text book of theology in schools effected the transition. Revelation was no longer viewed as the great deeds of God, what he did for the sake of humanity to redeem it, but as the sum total of "truths" unattainable by the natural light of reason, but directly addressed to man in propositional fashion for his acceptance. Since theology is the science of God, Lombard arranged it as discussion of the truths about God, his trinitarian nature, and his acts of creation, incarnation and redemption.

Thomas Aquinas understood that the revealed truths were communicated not merely to satisfy man's curiosity but for the sake of his salvation. Following the goal-

oriented approach of Aristotelian metaphysics Aquinas arranged the contents of his *Summa Theologica* around the central theme, "the emergence of beings from God and their return to him". In this he was able to complement Aristotle with Ps. Dionysius. In the Aristotelian scheme all beings tend to their ultimate perfection pulled by the Immovable Mover who moves all things by being known and loved by them. Dionysius followed the Platonic and Neo-Platonic scheme of the emergence of all things from the one Supreme Good by way of participation. But he corrected the Plotinian emanationism by stating that the first instalment of participation of beings from the One like rays from the sun, was their own individual natures. Through their own faculties, proper activities and specific objects they were able to return ultimately to their original source. Aquinas shifted the focus of theology from God to man, and this offended many conservative minds. This led to the condemnation by the bishop of Paris of a number of propositions drawn from the books of Aquinas after his death. Later he was cleared of all heresy and his canonization proclaimed the validity and timeliness of his theology. But his supernatural humanism took many centuries to catch on and even today it is not fully appreciated.

Theology in the age of print

The authority of theologians like Aquinas, Bonaventure, Duns Scotus and Albert the Great in the field of theology to a certain extent came from the manuscript culture of the Middle Ages. Access to the documents and records of culture, religion and learning in general, was limited to the monks, the clerks and clergy and they were the real power behind bishops and the Pope himself. But with the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century every one had direct access to the Christian texts and it became possible for individuals like Martin Luther and Calvin to question the statements of faith by the Pope and the hierarchy, appealing directly to the Bible. The scholar of the age of print claimed the freedom to arrive at new answers without hierarchical approval basing himself on the wealth of literary material available to him. In the

subsequent "Age of Enlightenment" Liberal Protestants like Peimarus, Renan and Harnack questioned the very historical basis of Christian faith, the Christ of primitive proclamation and the Christ of dogma and of reasoned theology. Jesus himself was reduced to a pale human figure.

This was a big challenge to both Protestant and Catholic theologians alike. Several Protestant theologians like Kierkegaard and Karl Barth endeavoured to dissociate faith completely from history. For Kierkegaard faith is man's existential encounter with the ultimate Truth, which cannot be adequately presented in the changing circumstances of time and history. One has to leave behind the world of sense experience and aesthetics through dread and boredom, go beyond the world of reason and ethics by a realization of the inadequacy of mere moral life for the attainment of divine life, and enter the silence and darkness of pure faith. It is sheer contradiction to mix history with faith. Karl Barth coming at the beginning of the 20th century started from the side of God and proposed what is known as kerygmatic theology or word theology: Divine revelation, Scripture, is God's word judging man and the world. It is not an object out there to be investigated and analyzed through the tools of human research. It is the living self-communication of God himself, actively present in his word reconciling the sinner to himself. Following the same trend several theologies emerged interpreting Christian faith in terms of current philosophies.

The Catholic response to the denial of the historical reality of the Christ of faith evolved rather slowly. Initially several attempts were made to construct a "life of Christ" based on the Gospels. These attempts were futile since the aim of the Gospels was not to present a biography of Christ, but to proclaim the Church's faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God incarnate in history. Soon Neo-Scholastic theologians readily admitted that the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth could not be proved or disproved by mere historical research. Christ of faith was not to be reduced to a mere ideology, a religion like any other

religion. Another line of argumentation showed that the faith of the believing Christian community is linked by an unbroken ecclesial tradition to the faith of the apostolic community, the direct witness of the Christ event and the recipient of the original revelation in Christ. In fact the norm for the Gospels is the apostolic faith. The living church of today represents the one ecclesial tradition derived from the apostles. So in sharp contrast to the Reformers who denied the relevance of ecclesial tradition, Neo-Scholastic theologians ascribed an independent authority to ecclesial tradition exalting the living magisterium of the Church as the contemporary bearer of the word of God, as were the prophets of old. With the definition of the papal prerogative of infallibility in 1870, and the prescription of the scholastic model of theologizing in the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* of 1879, method of theology was definitely fixed for Catholic theologians.

Theologizing in Vatican Council II

Thanks to the long and intense labour of biblical scholarship, as well as the ecumenical dialogue among the churches, the documents of Vatican II show a happy balance between the Biblical-Kerygmatic theology of Karl Barth and the hierarchical scholastic theology. Scripture and Tradition are not two independent sources of revelation. The only one source of revelation is Jesus Christ. As St. Augustine clearly taught, Scripture contains all the truths necessary for salvation. So ecclesiastical magisterium is subordinate to Scripture. But Scripture itself cannot be completely separated from the living faith and tradition of the Church. The communication of theological truth is preferably in the context of liturgy, the living experience of the word by the faithful under the guidance of the Spirit and the teaching of the bishops who have the charism of truth.

Church itself is not a mere institute of salvation catering to individuals the means for saving their souls. It is the mystery of the Father's plan for the redemption of humanity, revealed and executed by the Son in the incarnation, administered by the abiding presence of the Spirit.

It is the people of God formed by Christ as his mystical body by communicating to those who are called together from every nation his own Spirit (L.G. 7). The Council did not stick to the image of the church emerging from past dogmatic definitions as a perfect society founded by Christ, and distinguished from all others by the notes of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. Instead of basing itself on the data of Biblical revelation and the actual living experience of the people it presented the church as the community of conscious and free human persons gathered around the Risen Christ, related to him in different gradations of intimacy.

The theological shift was most clearly seen in the *Gaudium et Spes*, the pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world. Its first drafts were presented in true scholastic fashion, with a static perspective on the objective character of the Christian moral order, and Christian conscience, righteousness, and the vocation of man, and the ordination of the whole natural order, family, economic and social order, science, arts, technology and the state subjected to the supernatural and eternal salvation of man. The Malines text prepared by a group of theologians under the leadership of Cardinal Suenens emphasized the twofold orientation of the church, one towards her interior directed to the intimate mystery of the church, and the other towards the world especially for building it up. This too was a dogmatic and theoretical approach and so was rejected. The committee which prepared the final draft accepted by the Council started its work establishing certain clear principles about its theologizing: 1) The document should start from Gospel truths directly concerned with the world; 2) It should show the Church as present in the world as 'the people of God'; 3) It should stress dialogue with all and discernment of the signs of the times; 4) It should emphasize the diaspora context and the pluralistic society in which the Christians live today; 5) It should give serious consideration of human person and his/her dignity in dialogue and solidarity with all. These principles show that theology is not the private activity of a few

specialists, intelligible only to a select group or only to the members of the Church. It is the activity of the whole people of God for the benefit of all God's children.

III. Emergence of Theology as an Autonomous Science

With Vatican Council II the place of theology as a distinct discipline with an authority and role differing from the pastoral office of the bishops has become clear. Its role is not merely to bear witness to the faith of the Church or to demonstrate from Scripture and Tradition what the magisterium declares to be the doctrine of faith. It has a distinct academic role to play along with other sciences, and to discover new truths. Pope John XXIII in his very opening address to Vatican II broke the old idea that the task of the Church was merely to keep the immutable teaching *traditum custodire*. He declared: "Our sacred duty is not only to guard this precious treasure, as if it were concerned only with antiquity, but to dedicate ourselves with an earnest will and without fear to that work which our era demands of us." In the light of this teaching, the Council states in the *Dei Verbum*, "Theologians are now being asked within the methods and limits of the science of theology, to seek out more efficient ways... of presenting their teaching to the modern man: for the deposit and the truths of faith are one thing, the manner of expressing them is quite another" (62). So Pope Paul VI in his address to the International Theological Commission on October 6, 1969 expressed his intention "to recognize the laws and exigencies that are part and parcel of theological studies" and "to respect the freedom of expression rightfully belonging to the theological science and the need for research inherent to its progress" (AAS 61 (1969) p. 715).

According to the "Theses on the Relationship between the Ecclesiastical Magisterium and Theology" produced and approved by the International Theological Commission in 1975, the theologians shared in the teaching authority of the church, which 'should be put into practice in a co-responsible, cooperative and collegial

association of the members of the magisterium and of individual theologians". The fourth thesis states that it is incumbent on the magisterium to "preserve the personal and indispensable responsibility of individual theologians, without which the science of faith would make no progress".

So the authority of a theologian does not come from any delegation from the magisterium to teach, but from his competence in the science of interpreting faith. Vatican Council I had indicated three avenues for the theologian to interpret faith: 1) analogies for the mysteries of faith drawn from reasoning; 2) interrelation among the mysteries themselves; and 3) their relationship with the final goal of man. Though the data of divine revelation pertain to a level of reality far transcending human experience, still they belong to the order of being. Since the object of the intellect is all being, even the divine mysteries can be made, in some manner intelligible by applying to them the general laws of being and drawing analogies from the field of experience which at least remotely indicate how the divine realities can be understood to be. But the more reliable and reasonable approach is to explain the mysteries through mysteries intimately connected with them like the Incarnation through the mystery of the Trinity, and the mystery of supernatural grace through the mystery of salvation and the indwelling of the three divine persons in the human soul. But the most significant perspective on the divinely disclosed mysteries is mystagogical, to see them as effectively moving us to an intimate experience of our own supernatural destiny. In all these three approaches the object of theology was God himself or matters intimately connected with Him.

But today the focus of theology has shifted to man himself. Indeed, God revealing himself through words and deeds is still the source of theologizing. But what God reveals is for the sake of man, the meaning of God for him, God as involved in the work of human salvation. God is revealed as the source from which man and other beings originate and as the final goal to which all have to return. In short God is revealing man to man himself, showing him

how he has to attain his full perfection by discovering God as his ultimate happiness. The incarnation of the Son of God as Jesus of Nazareth is revelation of man's own authentic humanity that reaches ultimate fulfilment in the unique "I am" of the divine Logos. So theology is not an ontology of God for man but rather an anthroplogy of man for God !

The function of theology is no longer to explain the items of the Creed or to elaborate the official teachings of the Church. Following the example of the Biblical writers the theologian tries to apply faith and the Gospel to the actual life situations of the people. For the theologian today to be truly faithful to the saving message of Christ, is to make it relevant and meaningful to the needs and moods of the modern man. It is not enough that he repeats the message as it was announced in the Biblical times and written down in the books of the Bible. Nor is it enough to state it in the same idioms and formulas used by the ecclesiastical authority from time to time to defend the truth against errors and heresies. He has to make God's word take flesh in the varied situations of modern life in the different cultures and contexts.

IV. Theological Pluralism Today

The willingness of Vatican II especially in its pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world to make the Gospel truths relevant to modern man and to enter into an active dialogue with him has given positive encouragement to new orientations in theology. The new perspective of theology with man as the focus has encouraged the emergence of a theology of radical secularity. New trends in philosophical thinking have created each its own version of theology as well. The primacy of praxis over mere theory in the perception of the modern man has produced several action-oriented political theologies. The centrality of experience in modern consciousness points also to an interreligious theology with a mystical bend.

i. **Theology of radical secularity:** There is a basic flaw in the scholastic arguments for the existence of God: they start with

affirming the reality of the finite world of experience and then postulate an infinite transcendental cause apparently outside of and additional to the finite. But an "infinite" that has something outside and additional to it is a contradiction in terms; anything that has something outside of it cannot be infinite. This is the logical liability of any theology that would discuss a God "up there" or "out there". This is the basis for Christian secularism popularised among Catholics by Teilhard de Chardin, and by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Protestant circles. This secularist theology is quite opposed to kerygmatic and hierarchical schools of theology which appear to be too church centred, too private and too other-worldly. God is not only transcendental but also immanent in the heart of the human world, in the events of current secular history in which man's future is being shaped. Divine revelation is not confined to the Bible or the Church or to the word of the prophet. God reveals himself in his whole creation culminating in the incarnation of the Son of God. It is a dimension of our experience, also of the contemporary experience, as God addresses us through the signs of the times.

This theology of secularity places the emphasis not on the maintenance of the church but on the emergence of the Kingdom of God, which is wider and larger than the Church. Are we asked by Christ simply to keep and maintain what he established, the Church, or to continue doing what he was doing, bringing all God's children into God's kingdom, the future reign of justice, peace, freedom and love? If contact with the divine Logos in the flesh of Jesus Christ could more than replace the divinely instituted covenantal sign of Jewish circumcision, should not the living presence of the same Christ in the midst of those who sincerely seek him be reason enough for us to look for the fellowship of all believers even beyond the ritual symbol of baptism? "Believers, no matter what their religion", says *Church in the Modern World*, "have always recognized the voice and the revelation of God in the language of creatures" (art.36). Church cannot restrict itself to the Holy Bible for revelation, but has "the duty of

scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel" (*Ibid.* art. 4).

ii. Philosophical theologies: The importance, however, of philosophical theologies to make faith intelligible to a sophisticated world has not diminished. But understanding of philosophy itself has somewhat changed. It is no longer a field monopolized by the so-called "perennial" philosophy of Aquinas and Aristotle, Plato, Plotinus and Augustine. Idealistic trends of Kant and Hegel, phenomenology of Husserl and Max Scheler, existentialism of Heidegger, personalism of Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel and a host of other philosophies, not to speak of the strong influence of Oriental thought, have come to shape theological thinking today. No single theologian can be pointed out as completely tied to a particular philosophical school. Each theologian tries to draw inspiration from a variety of philosophical schools to make faith intelligible today.

What connects these different theologies into one is the scholastic context in which they arise. Karl Rahner, Congar, Schillebeeckx, Hans Küng, Hans Urs von Balthasar and a great many others create their theology in an academic setting, impelled by the need of interpreting Christian faith in a theological school or seminary. A seminary somewhat removed from the actual life and struggle of the people is not the ideal ground for creating an original theology. These theologians are not self-employed, but are spokespersons of the official church and their work is a public function for the community. They start from a theoretical framework of faith proposed in the official teaching of the Church, unity and trinity of God, creation and fall of man, incarnation and redemption, the church, sacraments, grace and eschatology. Task of theology is to make the official teachings and formulations intelligible and applicable to the daily life of people.

This ecclesial faith is made experiential not by any field work or input from the actual life of people today, but by the interaction of the different departments, and sections of the theological school. Scriptural scholarship brings out the actual kerygmatic context in which the

various elements of faith emerged into Christian consciousness through the teaching of Christ and of the apostles. Ecclesiastical history explains the different historical, social, political vicissitudes and controversies through which various church doctrines evolved. Moral and pastoral studies show how these doctrines can be made relevant and applicable to the daily life of people. Liturgical studies show how the same traditional faith has been incorporated into the official worship of the Church.

The only problem with this type of theology which is the staple fare in our seminaries is that it is a theology only for the theologians. It is the theology of the élite and cannot easily be shared by all the believers to make it a veritable communitarian reflection on faith. Since most of the philosophies that supported such rational interpretations have today gone out of fashion and are unintelligible even to the elite, theologies dependent on them have become a sort of secret language understood only by those who teach them and the immediately taught.

iii. Political theology: Another line of theology starts assuming the primacy of praxis over theory. Theology is not the elaboration of a few abstract principles of faith applying them to actual life; but reflection on the life of faith, consciously encountered and celebrated by the community. Faith itself as a loving acceptance of God's self-gift, even when reason cannot penetrate the inner secrets of what is revealed, is not mere theory but praxis. The object of this faith is not 'out there' or 'up there' but 'down here' in one's life with other human beings. As Gustavo Guttieres puts it, "Humanity is the temple of God who became human". So the task of Christian faith and theology is to make human life more authentically human, and human society achieve its goal as God wills it.

Political theology proposes that this human world with its ambivalent stance towards God, awareness of God's immanent presence in it and constant rebellion against God's law, has to attain salvation through its own inner dynamics. This world as creation has been called by the will of God in his self-communication to man. This

call is achieved in God's own plan of fulfilment for the world through its own activity. Central to this fulfilment is man's free acceptance of the world as God has given it to him So Christianization of the world called for by Christian faith does not mean any mere addition to or sublimation of its realities, but its own transformation from within. Sin is something violent and imposes on the world something alien to it; it is not freedom but slavery. So the Christian task is clearly political, to call things out of their sinful alienation into the 'polis' of the truly human world. Grace only perfects nature. Hence the church, the historically tangible sign of grace within the world is not an opponent of the world, but its guarantor, since she is in the service of the universal will of God.

Each individual human being has to be called out of his isolation of sin and selfishness to a communion and community with other human beings and the whole world. More than his/her spirit and intellectual life, bodily existence is the point of constant communication and communion with others, with the world. The Biblical human is a worker with his/her hands, and is free at the same time; he/she is a totality, not split up into body and soul, spirit and matter. In the incarnation of the Son of God in human flesh we discover a fellowship on the divine plane of the Father, Son and Spirit of love. Over against this divine vision, our task of building up the human 'polis', the natural political society, meets with a double challenge, one at the top, the denial of the existence of God by atheism, and the other at the bottom, the denial of human freedom and the physical amenities of life through the greed of people and through social structures of injustice and domination. These two challenges have produced two types of political theologies, one moving towards faith and hope and creativity, and the other towards liberation.

iv. Political theology of hope: According to the Christian Gospel, we stand before the face of our creator, the God who "dwells in unapproachable light" (1 Tim. 6:16). Our attachment in faith to this God of absolute transcendence actually liberates us. Denial of God absolutizes the world.

Faith in God is at the same time openness to the non-absolute non-divine reality of the world. This faith makes the world available to us: 'Everything is for you, you for Christ and Christ for God.' This reveals to us the uniqueness of our freedom. Ours is not a world of stocks and stones, nor of mere abstract values, but a world of persons in communion, opening out into a fellowship with the divine persons.

A living theology is not exactly the philosophical interpretation of a number of static elements of abstract doctrine like the nature of God, nature of sin, nature of the incarnate Word and the like. A living theology is event-centred and community-centred. It is to realize in this community the great events of God's dealings with the human family, the birth, baptism and penance of Christ, his victory over the temptations in the desert, his Pasch and abiding presence in the midst of his people, his sufferings and death on the cross, his resurrection and glorification. The Christian Gospel is a programme of action for realizing these mysteries in every individual human being and every human community. Only in this total openness to the divine drama of God's self-disclosure to man can Christian hope be fully justified.

v. Theology of liberation: The other challenge to a political theology is the great poverty, misery and deprivation in which a vast majority of human beings live. There was a time when poverty and hunger were thought inevitable and the only solution was said to be to persuade the rich to be kind and generous to the poor. Today it has become clear that a great part of human poverty and misery are man-made and therefore sin. Widespread poverty, conditions of social and cultural backwardness are the result of structures of injustice that have kept great sections of society in a no-win situation. So if the Christian faith is to be really "good news to the poor and liberation to captives" it has to address itself to these concrete situations of human misery and suffering. Christ is again being crucified in his members. Any amount of theoretical explanation and preaching of good will may not bring sal-

vation to the miserable and down-trodden. Theology has to be fully contextualized and it has to arise from the hearts of people who reflect on the Gospel and bring it to bear on their actual situation. Only by sharing the life with the poor and experiencing with them what it is to suffer hunger, go without even the bare necessities of life and be at the receiving end of injustice and oppression may a living theology relevant to the people's life be created.

It is not enough to blame evil in general, injustices in the world at large. The evils that plague a given community have to be investigated and the roots of the injustice and exploitation explored through appropriate social analysis. Such a theology has also to be action oriented. It is not enough to sympathize with the poor, suffer with them and pray with them. One has also to fight on their side for a total reformation of society and the achievement of justice, freedom and God's rule. What is required is to translate one's faith into solidarity with various groups and agencies committed to the liberation of the whole human being. Here the approach has to be dialectical. The inherited wisdom and the culturally accepted praxis which through long centuries created such a situation have to be rejected. Only the shock of this initial denial can send people back to the Scriptures and to their own tradition. There one can retrieve in a new key the liberating truths of their faith. Rich and poor alike need the redemptive message of the Gospel and the service of the Church, and here the Church cannot restrict her service to one side alone. But in a situation in which the poor are pitted against the rich in their struggle to throw away the yoke of centuries of discrimination, injustice and oppression the Church has only one choice. She has to declare and practise her preferential option for the poor.

Theology of Liberation has its application not only in the social field, but in analogous cases of discrimination and oppression. Thus women, the repressed and underprivileged half of humanity, blacks, and other sections that have suffered neglect and discrimination through

centuries are today creating their own versions of liberation theology.

vi. Ashram theology: A Christian theology to be fully relevant to India should respond not only to the socio-political and economic context of the people but also to the call of the Spirit common to the Indian religions. In contrast to the creative pole of human experience that seeks to transform the world and society, there is also a contemplative pole that seeks the Immutable in the changing things of this world. The Indian religious traditions show a remarkable similarity in their approach to the transcendent object and goal of faith. Here again it is not the content of faith that matters as its total orientation and method.

Revelation: The basic approach to the divine is one of silent experience in the cave of the heart. The divine self-disclosure is not considered primarily a body of truths, nor something written down and transmitted under divine inspiration and guidance. It is something beyond human words and expressions that can only be intuitively experienced and realized.

Supernatural Anthropology: There is a temptation to conceptualize this experience of the divine-self disclosure and to make a system out of it, in the line of the Advaita of Sankara, the Visistadvaita of Ramanuja, the scholastic system of Aquinas and the like. Such conceptualization is a self-defeating procedure since all our concepts are derived from our experience of the world. We would be reducing the Infinite into some form and framework of the finite. Any genuine theology should follow the inner dynamics of *anubhava*, a conceptless personal encounter in silence. It is total openness. Sin is the closing up of this openness, isolating oneself from God and others, making oneself a pseudo-absolute.

Christ and the Trinity of God: This radical openness of the human self to the divine self-disclosure has two poles, the divine pole of infinite reality and the human pole of indefinite perfectibility. Jesus Christ, the word-

made-flesh indicates this pole of human perfectibility. Every one is called to attain the stature of the Son of God. In him who attached to his divine self a human nature, suffered, died and rose from the dead in that concrete humanity, our human self finds some one who identified himself with our flesh and yet in that flesh was able to say: "I and the Father are one." The meaning and purpose of the incarnation and of the whole Christology is to reveal this divine sonship, man is invited to share. The other pole of *anubhava* is the infinite divine reality. In Christian experience this divine pole is not anything impersonal. By the very nature of experience as the openness of the self to the "other", its object too is personal, in fact tri-personal. The one who responds to the innermost dynamics of our self, our radical emptiness, is the Holy Spirit, the self-gift of God. This Spirit opens our self in a filial relationship analogous to that of the Son to the Father thus making us sons in the one Son of God. Church itself is this experiential fellowship in the Trinity of God. Since this is the goal of human life itself, this Ashram theology is an end in itself and not a means towards something else.

Conclusion

Today the scope of theology has radically changed from what it was in the age of polemics. Right from the early centuries of Christianity when errors and heresies came up, the main concern was to refute errors and to defend the true faith of the Church. Today theology has very few heresies to contend with. So it has gone back to the spirit of the apostolic times when the principal aim was to address the kerygma to the actual situation of the people, to resolve their immediate problems, enrich their Christian life by deepening their experience of God in Christ. For this faith has to be made more relevant to human life addressing at the same time his social problems and also his need to enter into a deeper experience of God.

The Future of the Church's Mission in India

The aim of mission is to promote a dialogue between the Word of God and the human community to which that Word is addressed as a call to conversion — "metanoia". This mission is conditioned by the historical situation, the socio-economic circumstances and the cultural background of the community. The word that comes to this community is not an abstract word, but comes as the "Good News" and as the power of liberation and wholeness in this situation. The Christian community is but the messenger, but one that not only conveys the message, but does so by living it, embodying it, witnessing to it and showing how the "Good News" is operative in its own life. This dialogical process therefore situates the double focus of mission: the Kingdom and the Church. The primary focus is spelt out by the prayer 'Our Father': "Thy Kingdom come." It is in view of this primary objective that the Church is built up as a sacrament of the Kingdom.

A two-fold inculturation

It is in the context of this double objective that we must understand today the complex and complete meaning of inculturation. Culture is the way a people live and express themselves in community relationships and celebration. When the word of God comes to a particular cultural situation it transforms that culture. But this transformation is not only for the benefit of the small or big Christian community that might emerge in that cultural situation, but, through that Christian community, sometimes even in spite of it, for the benefit of the whole culture, often in ways known only to God. To take our own country as an example, while it is true that the "Unknown Christ" has been and continues to be operative, it is also true that the "Acknowledged Christ" has also had an impact,

through various leaders and reformers, in the transformation of the country. That a person like Gandhi would not attribute the Christian influence on him to any Church community in India is secondary. What is important is that Christ did have some influence in shaping his vision and policies. It is of course more difficult to measure the influence of the many Christian institutions that we have in the country on the thousands of beneficiaries who pass through them. But we cannot deny that they have had some influence. In so far as this had an impact in transforming them in some way and through them the culture of the people as a whole it is already evangelization. The point I wish to make here is that when we speak of our mission in India we should not think merely in terms of building up a local Church that is inculturated and relevant, but also what the Church could do to transform the culture and people of India and thus contribute towards the building up of the Kingdom.

My focus in the following pages would be more on what the Church today could and should do for India in view of the Kingdom, rather than for itself. I would also suggest that what it could do for itself should be determined in the function of its wider mission to the whole people of India.

A contextualised mission

Every one knows the famous words of Gandhi that to a hungry person even God would dare to appear only in the form of bread. One cannot reflect on what the Church could do for India today without briefly evoking the situation of India today. So much is being said and written about the situation in the country that it would be sufficient to be brief and indicative.

It sounds almost platitudinous to say that India is a poor country. Perhaps it would be more relevant to say that nothing much is done to improve the lot of the poor. Successive Governments have spoken about Socialism. We have had many five year plans. But on the whole it is only a small proportion of the Middle Class, Upper Middle Class

and the Rich who have profited by it. They continue to become more and more wealthy while the poor continue to become more and more destitute.

The problem of caste cuts at the very root of the equality that our democracy so proudly proclaims in the preamble of its Constitution. The "Untouchables" are nearly 25% of the population and there is no sign of any improvement in their lot, either economically or socially. The affirmative action through reservations reaches a small portion of the elite among them. While there is some mobility in the intermediate castes through sanskritization, economic betterment or access to political power, as far as the whole system is concerned there has been no change structurally. The fact that the "untouchables" are becoming increasingly aware of and resentful of their situation is only making matters more painful for them without bringing any change. The change will have to come from the total community as such, because it involves a total social restructuring of the community.

At the moment, our country is a very divided one. It is true that India has not really been one country till 1947 and its birth itself was marked by the painful process of division along religious lines. Communalism has been a problem since its birth. It has now been aggravated by economic and political circumstances. Communal conflicts, based not only on religion but also on language, ethnicity, caste, etc. are tearing the country apart in various ways. Some years ago one used to talk seriously about national integration. Today we do not seem even to talk about it. We should not however think of communalism purely in terms of the political unity of the country. Even if tomorrow we divide India into various units, pluralism of castes, ethnic groups, languages and religions would still be a problem in every unit. Hence community building is as important and difficult in a village, city, State, Region etc. as in the whole country. Communalism also has economic aspects. For example, Indira Gandhi had no difficulty in granting the purely religious requests of the Sikh agitators. The real bone of contention was matters like territory and

share of the river waters. More deeply, communalism has cultural and even spiritual roots. One has a strong sense of group identity. While one wishes for power and wealth, one does not wish it for everybody. It is a sort of collective selfishness, the collectivity extending not even to the whole community, but to an elite that has the political and economic power. This is the opposite of a broad humanism.

Community Building

What can be done to tackle these problems? Reflecting, perhaps at an abstract level, to begin with, I think that we have to build up communities of people. These communities would be characterized by the following basic attitudes: respect for the dignity and individuality of every human person, irrespective of his caste, creed or ethnicity, a sense of concern for one another that is ready to share without being selfish; a sense of togetherness and participation shown in dialogue and collaboration that is the mark of a real democratic society. These values and attitudes will have to be worked out in terms of appropriate economic, social and political structures. But these structures would not emerge, nor will they be effective, if these basic attitudes are not there as the source from which the structures originate. Without these attitudes, legal frameworks, political rhetoric and even economic planning are useless. These attitudes cannot be cultivated in the abstract in the country as a whole, but only in local communities of reasonable size.

The failure of the church

How can the Church help in this process? Ideally speaking, every Christian community should be a fellowship, such as the one described above. But one would be hard put to find today many communities who live up to this ideal. These are not new ideals. In a sense the Church has been promoting these in ways it considered adequate. But an honest evaluation would show that its efforts have not been really effective. The visibility of the Church in India today would be its institutions, concerned with education health and development. Our educational institutions have

perhaps helped our own Christians to emerge into the middle class and become as selfish as any other middle and upper class population anywhere. We have rendered a similar service to the better off people of other religions. We have not been able to fulfil even the limited objective of communicating the faith to our Christian students. Our developmental programmes have shared the same fate as those of the Government. They have helped the better off or those who have an easy access to our resources. They have not really reached the marginalised or the really poor.

Church communities are as notorious proportionately for their disputes along ritual, linguistic or communal lines as any other communities. As regards caste too the Church has made little headway. By simply accepting it and not doing anything about it the Church has placed itself in an unenviable position. The Hindus and the Government consider that Christians (and Muslims) do not have discrimination of castes. But an untouchable community that becomes Christian does not on that account improve its status in relation to the other caste communities around it. It does not improve its status with regard to the other caste communities within the Church either. So they become doubly disadvantaged. The recent movements among Christians to demand concessions and reservations for Scheduled Caste Christians as to others of a similar status could only strengthen their caste identity and consequent discrimination both in the Church and in the world. The Church in this manner is effectively abandoning any pretensions about trying for a casteless society. May be it is a more honest attitude; but not more evangelical -- nor prophetic.

This is the record of the Church so far. What should the Church do then? What is it called to do today? What India needs today is an ideology for a pluralistic society at the theoretical level and a people's movement for liberation and wholeness at the practical level. The Church can contribute to the development of such an ideology and also be one of the moving forces behind the people's movement. In the process the Church itself can become more

authentically Church in the very act of being the servant of the people. Let me try to explain this.

A new great tradition

Every country has an image of the kind of society it wishes to become in the light of which it gives itself the appropriate socio-economic and political structures and the necessary means in terms of action plans. Gandhi had the ideal of the 'Ramrajya'. Jaya Prakash Narayan proposed 'Total Revolution'. India's Constitution envisages a secular democracy, that commits itself "to secure to all its citizens: justice, social, economic and political; liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; equality of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all *fraternity* assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the Nation". This has set up for us a socio-political ideal and the structures appropriate to work towards it. In the context of the religious pluralism in the country the Constitution has chosen secularism, not as anti-religious, but as open to all religions, shown particularly by its recognition of minority rights. But this ideal cannot be said to have been interiorized by the country as a whole. Besides other obstacles of an economic and political character, it seems to be encountering two that have their root in religion and culture. Though the Constitution has given the country a secular ideal it will not become real till the various religious groups make this ideal their own and decide to build a new human community in India where each one would have the freedom and the respect of the others with regard to his faith convictions, but at the same time seek to bring to the community the richness of his convictions, inspiration and values. In this manner, in a community of people mutually respecting and enriching each other, religion would not be a force for division, but a matter of the "root", of identity and openness, in an atmosphere of tolerance and collaboration.

Such a collaboration and participation is possible only where every citizen feels equally involved and accepted. I think that at the moment there is a cultural block to this. If we today ask some one: 'What is Indian culture ?'

we would probably hear of the Vedas and the Upanishads, the Bhakti traditions and the Epics, the Architecture and the Arts etc., that is, by and large, the Indian cultural tradition will largely be seen as a Hindu tradition. Islam and Christianity and a lot of other smaller religions and various ethnic groups in the middle of India and in the North East have had their own creations and contributions. They are present in history and in the cultural Tradition. But somehow they are not integrated into the mainstream of the cultural tradition. For whatever reason these groups feel marginal and even foreign in the Great Tradition of the country. Talk about a Hindu India, or of an India where the Hindus will dominate because they form the majority of the population make matters only worse. These fears and this experience of marginalization on the part of the minorities can disappear only if we can create a new Great Tradition that succeeds in integrating the contribution of all the various cultural traditions of India. There must be a totality in which, the Christian, the Muslim and the Sikh, the tribal and even the most oppressed groups can identify their contributions taken up in an integrated whole - a totality which every Indian can collectively acknowledge as his own because he also has contributed to it. Such a totality can evolve only through dialogue, through give and take, through the respecting of each one's individuality and identity. This mutual respect must reach out beyond the cultural to the religious. This can only be the collective work of all.

In the perspective of a unity in pluralism this new Great Tradition has yet to create a 'we' feeling which does not discriminate among people on the basis of caste, creed, language, ethnic origins, and religion. This would provide the foundation for a broad humanism that is secular and democratic. Obviously it would not resolve problems of a moral nature like selfishness, corruption and violence. It would not either provide ready-made economic and political solutions that the country is facing. But it will provide a *cultural* basis conducive to a successful handling of problems at other levels. The different

religions would be called on to provide the ultimate meaning and motivation to this common project to their own believers in the first place and jointly through dialogue to the community as a whole. It will be the task of inter-religious dialogue that the identity of each religion is respected and, even while each believer bears witness to his own religious convictions, these convictions do not become obstacles to an active collaboration at all levels, economic, social, political and cultural and even religious – as was shown in Assisi when leaders of all religions joined in a common prayer for peace.

A facilitating role for the church

What could be the role of the Church in this project? First of all, I really think that the Church can play a mediating and facilitating role in bringing everyone together. Hindu-Muslim conflict has in a way become endemic in the country. Following the leadership of the Pope in Assisi, October, 1986, the Church can be an instrument of peace. It has already been playing such a role though in a very limited way in the various kinds of dialogues and live-in sessions that it has been organizing in India over the past many years. But this has so far been an activity of experts. Such meetings continue to be necessary. But at the same time we should widen participation to include people at all levels. We should also broaden the focus to include not only inter-religious exchange but also a common effort to make a religious impact on common human problems.

If this dialogue is done seriously one would probably find that there is a large amount of consensus on most of the basic values among the various religious groups, even if each religious group seeks to justify it according to its beliefs and world view. We speak often about a secular humanism. Do we think of it as a purely rational affair that keeps clear of religious belief, at the real risk of becoming atheistic on the claim of being purely rational or as something that searches the least common denominator on which all would agree or finally as something that emerges out of the contribution of every one rooted in one's faith, without forcing it on anybody else, but through dialogue seeking

to enrich and challenge each other and in this manner growing by assimilating the positive values from others and renouncing the negative values in oneself. This is a difficult process. Yet in a multi-religious society, it is through such a process that the Church would be able to establish its identity in comparison with others, be a strong and relevant witness to its message and its values, and at the same time make its contribution to the totality of values in the service of the human community.

The question is whether in the kind of situation we have in India today, the Church, instead of simply being exclusive and self-defensive, can take the initiative in bringing people together around common tasks, promote mutual understanding and sharing through dialogue and thus facilitate the emergence of a new Great Tradition that would not simply be Hindu, but Indian and therefore multi-religious. This would be a model, not only for India, but for the whole world.

A people's movement

It is in this context that I would like to propose that the Church must really become the centre of a people's movement. First of all the Church must be in itself a people's movement. The whole Church is on mission: to build a new heaven and a new earth - a new humanity, which is the Kingdom of God. This cannot be done by simply concentrating on personal conversion and on personal salvation. Faith today manifests itself in working for justice. Given the present oppressive structures this would involve a struggle. This struggle must be engaged in by the people themselves. The Church cannot really bring about any transformation in the world without in some way getting involved, struggling with the people. In short, it must become a people's movement. But in a multi-religious community like that of India, one cannot think of a people's movement that is exclusively Christian. Just as the Christians are oppressed with all the others they will also struggle with the others. Here also it can play a role of animation - not being exclusive, but by facilitating, coordinating, etc. The new Great Tradition itself would emerge

dialectically from a multi-religious struggle for liberation and wholeness.

In this whole process the Church as a religion would also have a religious role. That is the role of animation, inspiration, clarification and motivation, relating the action to ultimate values and world views. This religious role — of the Church as of the other religions — would be integral to any process for a holistic liberation. This is what we mean by rejecting a merely rational humanism, however noble. But the Church is not simply a religion. It is people. That is why even this religious contribution would not be made in the class rooms of theologates, but in the fields of struggle where people live and experience their faith and have an opportunity for an ongoing reflection on what they are doing in the light of their faith.

A renewed mission

So I would suggest that in the years to come the Church should dedicate itself to this as a priority and focus all its energies, its communities, its institutions and its resources on this goal. This people's movement has already started in the form of various action groups. Would the Church in India back it up and make this its own priority and in this way combine in a creative manner, the various dimensions of its mission, namely, dialogue, liberation, inculturation and proclamation? As an authentic and living witness to the "Good News" of the Kingdom it will be proclamation. As a process to transform Indian culture in view of building up a new Great Tradition it will be creative inculturation. As a people's movement it will promote liberation. All this will be done in collaboration with other believers through dialogue.

This mission would/should eventually condition the life and activity of the Church, the formation of its leadership, the role of the Laity and the necessary and inevitable involvement of the people in public life.

Theology in Our Seminaries

Introduction

Vatican Council II has given clear directives and encouragement for the reorientation of Christian theology according to the particular context of every culture. The decree *Ad Gentes* on evangelization states that Christian life should be adapted "to the mentality and characteristics of each culture" (*AG* 22). The pastoral constitution on the Church in the Modern World said that "the ability to express Christ's message in its own way should be developed in each nation" (*GS* 44). Following this lead the International Theological Commission proposed in 1973 that owing to the missionary character of Christian faith "the events and words revealed by God must be every time rethought, reformulated and relived again within each human culture". But this suggestion for the reorientation of theology have yet to find a proper response from our theological seminaries. Nothing very much has changed there from the pre-Vatican times. What is the problem? What should be done to change our attitude and perspective in the matter?

The various papers presented at the All India Seminar held at Pune in October 1978 on "Theologizing in India" had made a detailed critique of our way of doing theology and proposed several concrete suggestions for its renewal and contextualization. Similarly the Indian Theological Association in several of its annual meetings and specially in its statements appealed to all concerned to make radical changes in the theology of our seminaries.

But all these suggestions and earnest appeals seem

to have fallen on deaf years. If we go through the curricula and programmes of our seminaries everything remains the same as it was a quarter century ago. So I wrote to a number of our prominent theologians. The good percentage of answers I received shows the keen awareness of the problem among our theology teachers.

In my letter I raised the following four questions: (1) Theology can reflect only the actual life and attitude of the living church. What can we do to shake the Indian church out of its lethargy and conscientize it regarding its mission today? (2) What should be our priorities in our theological reflection? (3) As a small minority what can and should the Indian church do to fulfil her evangelical mission in the socio-political context of India today? (4) Are the arrangement and treatment of various topics in theological education in some way responsible for the anaemic and lethargic mood among the clergy and in the whole Indian Church? What can we do about it?

The answers received from the respondents is the substance of this article. On account of the abundance of material I received. I am obliged to make a selection though I have tried to incorporate all the positive ideas contributed. But to be honest I have also to note that a good number of respondents replied in the following typical manner: "Yes, I agree with you that we have to do something to contextualize our theology. The problem for me is time. I have so many things to attend to that I have no time to sit down and write out my ideas properly." Most of our seminary professors are so loaded with courses to teach and other functions and jobs besides that they have very little time to reflect upon and evaluate what they are teaching.

Though I presented these four questions they are all aspects of the same question. So the matter cannot be arranged under those four heads without breaking up the organic unity of the answers given. I have therefore arranged them under two main heads: what is the problem? What can be done? and give below the answers according to the main emphasis of the respondent.

I. What is the Problem?

1. Something Brought from Outside into our Culture (T. K. John, Vidyajyoti, Delhi)

1) Theology, Scripture, culture, finance, techniques, resources — all these were *brought* to this culture. The goal was a fair distribution of these among the people. Distant control, by the central ideological and other resources, assured its distribution by men and women who were moulded by the earlier theologies. To free our community of these and to enable it to read Scripture in the cultural context of India — that is the agony today. The first step in this direction may lie with our seminary training that is still totally in isolation from the realities of the country, its culture and its religions. But this is not possible, without sufficient academic freedom to experiment with new goals, methods of learning, method of teaching etc. Tight control over the seminary seems to be the chief obstacle to such experimentation. Regimented and overscreened exposure of students that come from our normal struggle-dominated situation to an altogether different interpretation of Faith makes them immune to the actual problems of the country. Trends and developments in the field of religion, economics, political trends and ideologies, force that control and determine the nation's steps and resources, do not figure in our insulated seminary training, and problems and issues that were dead long ago, and the insights that were born of those, still constitute the very culture of theology in India. Any departure from these, and any effort to think in fresh categories in a new situation, is frowned down upon in the name of orthodoxy. These are some of the factors that prevent our Church from making fresh steps in this direction.

2) Sufficient contact with and involvement in the actual life struggles of the present day Indian scene, is probably the starting point — in terms of priorities. This is the minimum we expect. This will not come about by instructions from above, recommendations from peers and conferences, but

primarily by staff involvement and experience, out of which a new learning method, for a new theology for India, will evolve. Wherever this has taken place, we come to know of new developments, new methods evolving, and hence incipient theology in the making is becoming available.

3) Probably the first step the Church in India is expected to take is a correct assessment of the socio-political and religio-cultural situation prevailing here. At some level this may be obtained, but not sufficiently widely, so as to become a force for new strategy, new ventures. A second important step may be a recognition of the religions of the country as *religions*. This theologically and at the practical level, seems not yet a reality. We have not yet evolved a theology of religions. The inherited understanding of other religions, of evangelisation etc. still remain as difficulties on the way of a better relationship with the people of other faiths. Early rejection is still fresh in the minds of our friends in other religions. Hence what we may have to attempt afresh will be establishing of friendly relationships with as many people of other faiths as possible. Such relationships can grow to become something like an alliance among the religions. Such an alliance is for a particular purpose: to come together so that religions may be able to help the society try to transform it, by releasing the moral, ethical and spiritual powers that the religions do possess. At present religions in India live in isolation. Christian humanitarian and even other projects are still intra-community concerns. Except in action-groups, inter-religious groups and projects seem still to take place. I would feel that probably this is the most important and urgent area which calls for reflection, planning and action. Though numerically small, the Christian community has enormous goodwill, experience, structures etc. that are geared to service. May be the time has come for new forms of collaboration in this area.

4) What has been emerging as a common phenomenon in many fora of consultation on priestly training, religious formation etc. is the inability of Church personnel to go beyond the traditional forms of work. It is reported that

in the North where a parish may not have more than a dozen or more families, the priest, in many cases, spends his time in occupations that are of a different nature, like farming etc. It has been found that his inadequate knowledge of and familiarity with the other religions, prevents him from taking initiative to enter into dialogal relationship with them. In other words, seminary training has not enabled him to meet an altogether different situation. The content of the theology he has been forced to absorb does not help him to face the new situation on which the prevailing theology may not have anything to say.

2. Theology should Reflect Life

(Cyril de Souza, Rector, Kristu Jyoti, Bangalore)

1) It is my understanding that theology has to reflect the actual life and attitude of the living church. Instead, I find we have a false type of theology, and theologizing. Our theologizing is based on documents of the Church and on authors who are not only not Indians, but who may not even have the context of the Christians and the peoples in India in mind at all.

What to do about this? We have to start a true form of theologizing that starts from the life experience of our people. We have to take into account the religious thinking and practice existing among the simple and ordinary people (popular religion). The aspirations and goals of the people may have to be guided and directed, etc... This will be a true form of theologizing that is connected and rooted in the life of our people.

There are isolated instances where this is done. Perhaps such is the case of the regional seminaries, where the language and culture of the people are taken into account in their theology. The work done in basic Christian communities may also be another example of a theologizing that starts with the people and the Word of God. But, I do believe, lots more has to be done in this regard in order to shake the Indian Church out of its lethargy.

I see the need for an effective and scientific methodology of theologizing. We cannot in real justice to our Christians just 'create' an Indian theology valid for an entire country that is so large, varied and far-flung and diverse. Even rural and urban styles qualify our Christians so divergently that we cannot mass them together. A clear methodology is our first requirement.

In our effort to be faithful to the Man of India today, we have to take into account his historical situation — everything (as far as is practically possible) that makes up his human existence.

2) More than considering what the Church must do, we must consider what the Church should 'be'. It is in the quality (= style) of life that we will truly be a leaven. Our Gospel-based witness, Christ-inspired principles have to be so ingrained in the texture of our lives so as to animate our cultures and peoples. For this, we have to be other Christs. Just as in a lump of dough the leaven is the minority, so also in the making of India, we who are minority should be the leaven of society in India in the face of our varied problems and crisis. This is what our theology must do: starting from our present situation lead them to a higher and newer form of life the type Christ has promised us.

3) Topics are not the only 'problem' in our defective theologizing. Our very starting point is defective. If our theologizing begins with the people, then our concern will already be different. This has a lot to do with a radical inculturation. It is not just a matter of rites and rituals and liturgies. It is the thinking that makes the person — and it is the 'thinking' that has to be sought. This 'thinking' makes the real culture, not just squatting and aggarbathi smoke and bhajan singing that makes culture.

This 'thinking' has to be the starting point of a true theologizing. In this way, we seek the word that is incarnate in the life of the Church of India. True the arrangements and treatment of the various topics in the theologists will also have to be arranged for this. We will have

to start with the concerns, worries, problems, aspirations, desires, etc ... of the people at the grass root level before going up the dizzy heights in our ivory towers theologizing about matters that do not concern them down below! The theologizing will have to concern itself with the Word — and this Word is incarnate in the lives of our people and not found in the libraries and universities of Europe and the USA.

3. An Uninvolved Theologizing

(Abraham Puthumana, Rector, Vidyajyoti, Delhi)

I fully agree with your statement that "theology can reflect only the actual life and attitude of the living church". I think here is the problem. The attitude of the church in India irrespective of rite differences, is one of caution, un-involvement with the struggles of the people and arm-chair theologizing. Here I think many in pastoral ministry, no matter on what rung of the hierarchical ladder they stand, and most theologians share a common heritage. Even among the most outspoken critics of the present system there are only a few theologians or pastoral leaders of the church who have experienced the life of the struggling poor for any decent duration. So what they lack is credibility.

My own little experience in working with the poor tells me that until I live with them at least for three to six months, I tend to see life from my own frame of reference and my articulation of the problems; responses are not rooted in the life of the people. As a result my reflection tends to be rarified and untrue to life.

I do think this is the situation with many of our ecclesiastical leadership and theological fraternity. So any attempt at conscientization by the group will sound more like slogans than as insights born in pain and through the uncertainties resulting from identification with the poor and the marginalised.

My suggestion is the following. If we are serious about conscientizing the Indian Church regarding its mission today at least the few who are committed to this task take six months off and live in the hovels of the poor and learn not by hearsay, not through intellectual ratiocination but from the dirt, muck and hunger what life is for the 300 million Indians who are starving and ask them about God religion and humanity. Then Indian theology will be born and no one will be able to stop the movement.

I think my answer to the first question, answers question number two. One thing ought to be avoided — living on borrowed ideas and vicarious experiences, mouth-ing of slogans even if it is of liberation theology and dichotomy between professed values and actual life. By the last I mean espousing Liberation Theology on the one hand and living and associating chiefly with the five star culture of India. This will destroy credibility. Many lay people have told me that today priesthood, religious life and theological pursuits have become a path to leisure and luxury.

One of the top priority for us today is to get out of our intra-mural internecine warfare and look out to the total Indian reality. We have to rethink the nature of the church much the same way St. Paul did when faced with the pagan world of his time. We have to hear the cry of the people for communal harmony, social justice and human dignity and try to shed whatever in our heritage that stifle listening and the follow-up-action that is demanded by our history. The parallel would be the way St. Paul discarded circumcision and other Jewish practices. We have to have the courage to question our heritage and go back to the person and message of Jesus even today. Such deeper contact with Jesus and intimacy with prevalent religions and culture of India will lead to a new insight into our mission, new interpretation of Jesus relevant for today. This effort is what is demanded of the Indian church as far as its evangelical mission today is concerned.

4. Dependence on Foreign Money

(Richard Sequeira, Rector, St. Joseph Seminary, Mangalore)

I would not agree that nothing is done in the country concerning the question. True, we cannot be content with it, nor be complacent but to give credit to those who have done some work and not to be absolutely pessimistic about the matter is only to be fair, it seems to me.

Now coming to your questions, for the 1st point, I would say that, to quite an extent, foreign subsidy has something to do with our attitudes. It always makes us look to the west not only for money, but also along with it to ideas as well. Besides it has been the Church's 'experience' and my own observation that when and where the Church has met with hardship and opposition, there the life of the Church has emerged more mission-minded. Where such opposition and hardship are not, Catholics busy themselves with their petty questions among themselves — whether it is language, rite or caste.

The priorities in our theological reflection should lie, it seems to me, in the social realities of our land, in the rich Indian religious tradition: here, of course, we need to distinguish between the mere external and accidental, and the deeper values, the realities beneath the symbols.

Though we are a small minority, in being the leaven of society, in encouraging our laity to enter into the socio-political field more and more, we have certainly a role to play. Perhaps we too often speak of minority rights, but not enough about our obligations towards the country — obligations in leadership, in moulding the ideas of people according to Christian principles. This may not apply equally to all places.

And finally about the last point: the fruits of the theological association meetings must be disseminated more and more in seminary circles. Those who have already done some work in the field could produce some orientation papers to help the seminary staff to guide their students in contextualising their theology.

5. An Institutional Model of Formation

(Mervin Caraiet, Morning Star College, Barrackpore.)

I cannot agree with your presupposition of an anaemic and lethargic church in India. It may be true for the comfortably established church in the South, of certain young clergymen and sophisticated well-to-do lay people. The church in the North, particularly in the North-East, is not lethargic at all. Conversions are going on by the thousands; priests are in constant contact with the people, new stations are being opened up at a breath-taking pace, and the students of theology, imbued with the missionary spirit, are engaged in the active ministry on weekends. No, there is not a dull moment. Lay missionaries, in their early twenties, are being trained and sent into Arunachal Pradesh where the Christian community is simple and charismatic, and growing by leaps and bounds. The understanding (good humoured, I hope) is that all missionary activity would stop if the church were established as institution and parish posted!

You are, however, certainly right in saying that the basic mentality/method is still colonial. The church is the big western mother, to be found in huge western financed/style buildings, and moves around in jeeps and Matadors. Her priests are produced from foreign synthetics. No diocese or religious congregation has the Gospel-guts to cut off the umbilical cord to the West. Money, books and academic degrees keep cascading into India, causing an inflation that is monetary — due to which the poor suffer — and academic in the form of superfluous and over-qualified personnel.

The Indian church has all the resources in men and material on the spot. But it lacks unity. Were it to achieve this goal, desired by the Lord, there could be an equitable distribution of both men and material. Even the massive developmental projects could be financed by the resources within the church bodies in the country. The official checks on foreign contributions clearly manifest the Indian Government's disapproval of foreign help entering

the country through private channels. One believes that the Government's disapproval is not misplaced.

The massive institutional model of the formation of mass-produced priests must go. Boys recruited from villages, many of them from a barely subsistence level of existence, are put into colonial-type establishments. It is no surprise that after 7 to 10 years they come out as full-fledged members of the bourgeoisie that thinks in terms of colour TVs, VCRs, super-speed cameras and Marutis. The anonymous herds of seminarians must be given an identity by dividing them into small groups of 10 to 12 and spread all over the country. They will live, pray and study in situations of necessary involvement with rural, semi-urban and urban populations, each group getting its turn to live in the various milieux. For intellectual instruction and spiritual guidance only those formators should be chosen who are willing and capable of such a life. Western books can be kept preserved as museum pieces, and the formators and their disciples will go out with Holy Scripture in one hand and Indian thought in the other.

A dream? Indeed. But unless we are going to risk taking bold steps into the future, the lethargy you lament will deepen and spread, so also the anonymity and the cases of dubious motivation. A seminar-fatigue has descended upon the Indian church, and those who come out of the workshops, jaded by the monotony of their discussions, are impotent at the thought that "nothing will/can be done".

6. The Critical Role of Theology

(Felix Wilfred, St. Paul's Seminary, Tiruchirappally)

The statement 'theology can reflect only the actual life and attitude of the living Church' needs to be qualified. The statement is true inasmuch as it is a contrast to a situation in which theology was, and is still, by and large, concerned about noetic contents, formulae etc. In this sense theology has to speak about what happens to people around

us. The element of contextualization, relevance and praxis -- those are comprised in the statement.

But in another sense, theology has to play a *critical role* and cannot simply content itself with reflecting the actual life. The actual life of the Church can be quite contrary to the demands of the Gospel and a refusal to the interpellations of the Spirit of God in history.

I think it is utopian to believe that the Church should be changed first in order to have a living theology. We assist at the phenomenon of a lot of zealous and committed people — laity, priests and religious — today who want to consciously dissociate themselves from the structures and mode of operation of the Church in order to be able to fulfil what they perceive as their Christian calling in the present historical moment. This is because they feel and are convinced that the present structures and modus operandi of the Church cannot cope with the demands of the present situation and challenges of God's mission in the present history of India as experienced by them. They are in direct touch with a lot of people at the lowest strata of our society and from this situation they are looking at the Church, at the faith and reflect what all this could mean in terms of the people and their struggles with which they try to identify themselves.

These individuals and groups are engaged in a search for meaning of their faith, not independent of their solidarity with the oppressed and their struggles with them. For these people theology is not a thin veneer smeared over their experience of struggle. Rather in their case the quest for meaning and the struggle for justice are intertwined. Here is the locus of theology where reflection and praxis encounter and are dialectically inter-related. In the absence of praxis as it happens in our theological institutions, theology turns out to be nothing but a narration of the past and the whole theological formation with all notions and concepts etc. imparted, have the cumulative effect of justifying the present system — eccle-

sial, socio-political etc. We need to strike at the root of a vacuous theologizing — namely an institutional Church that is self-complacent, self-contained, and if it relates to the world and people it thinks that it is out of its beneplacet!

I think, it is only by more and more people joining forces with all those movements working for the liberation of the masses, that the Church could be led to realize its alienation from the people. By the conflicts and confrontations which are bound to come with the people engaged at the grass-roots, for whom theologizing is an existential reality, the Church could be awakened from its innocent, and not always so innocent, slumber.

A second way, I think, is to break the over self-confidence of the Church which ironically stems from its over dependence on the money from abroad. It is this which makes the Church go ahead with a certain amount of activities — developmental, religious etc. with which it tends to identify the fulfilment of its mission. A truly local and non-dependent Church is a *conditio sine qua non* of the immersion into the lives of the people and the emergence of a truly Indian theology.

II. What can be Done ?

1. A Few General Principles

(Joe Mannath, S. H. Seminary, Poonamallee)

(1) Thinking depends a lot on our life style, close relationships and preferences. The Indian reality is one where the majority are poor, deprived of what we enjoy. We would prefer the current set up we enjoy rather than experience what the majority experience and then theologize.

(2) Lasting changes come from the convincing lives and teachings of a committed *minority*. The majority is, was, will be mediocre, at the best. This is true of the Church, religious life, seminaries...

(3) A priest is hardly accountable to anyone. This is not true of any other public office.

(4) Seminaries and religious communities do not seem to be attracting the best or the brightest young people in any remarkable numbers. Most young people — do not seem to see a noble or gripping challenge in our lives or the work they see us actually do.

(5) "Indian theology"? This interests mostly, I'm afraid, a few academies. The majority of catholics I meet are more interested in the *life* and *preaching* of the priest. The main thing is to be detached, liberated guru, the East looks for.

(6) In this sense, even the current enthusiasm in some for liberation theology here in India seems largely to consist in *talking about* it rather than *exercising* a preferential option for the poor and drawing conclusions from it.

(7) The Church is plagued by the linguistic and other divisions (caste, region, . . .) that weaken our country. So a person's real (emotional and effective) commitment is seen not in what he expresses officially (in a talk or paper).

I believe the following steps may help: (a) The readiness of a few people to live by, and preach and write what they really believe in, and be willing to bear the consequences; (b) greater assimilation of qualified and committed lay men and women into all spheres of Church life — formation work, teaching, parish animation, missionary work; (c) The preparation of formators (men and women of deep integrity, vision and humanity who can inspire younger people), not just people with degrees, to staff seminaries; (d) a more serious commitment to intellectual work — to research, publication, mutual critique — that will assure quality. We are not respected internationally (by and large) because our contributions are poor in quality and microscopic in volume, compared to the rest of the Church. Respect has to be won, not just asked for; (e) involve the local churches in financing the seminaries, church buildings, etc. This is crucial for self-respect, for a sense of responsibility and for a relationship of mutuality with other (wealthier) Churches. Right now

I think, most of us enjoy being dependent and enjoy not being accountable to families and parishes who may question our actions if they were providing for us.

2. A) Living Theology for India

(S. Arokiasamy, Principal, Vidyajyoti, Delhi)

- 1) We too easily speak of the Indian Church. Is the Church truly Indian? Has the Church inserted herself into the culture and history of India in its totality? Since the church is far from this insertion, how can she be relevant to the Indian reality? Only through a genuine and committed insertion into our history, can the church become a living Church, learn her mission and dare to serve and witness. The reality of India in its multi-religious dimension and a situation of immense poverty, largely a product of national and global injustice can alone shake us out of lethargy, conscientise us about the great challenges of our context and get us out of our narrow, navel-gazing Churchy pre-occupations. Only this can be the point of departure for our Theology.
- 2) We say our mission should shape our theology. But mission in our context includes a discerned priority of inter-faith dialogue and the promotion of justice in our situation of poverty. These great challenges of the wider oikumene can liberate us from ghetto intra-Church obsessions and theologies based on them. The coming together of different churches and religions needs to be oriented by the two great challenges of the wider oikumene since they are interconnected. A relevant living theology while rooted in our culture and history needs also to include a global perspective since all great human issues today are globally connected. All this calls for clear theological options. Liberalism in theology which ignores these challenges and options in our history and culture is a great threat to a living theology for India.
- 3) Christians, though a minority can and should become a catalyst and leaven in our country through its qualitative

value options and commitment. The Church — the community of believers — must learn and promote cooperative lifestyles, modes of working and struggling together with people of other faiths and all men of good will for the total well-being of our people. This needs a theology and a spirituality to support it. We should develop a Kingdom theology and a Kingdom spirituality. Minority status of Christians needs fresh and creative articulation in terms of our mission unto the wider oikumene.

4) If theological programme and learning are context-based in the diversity of cultures and history of our people, the great issues thrown up by the total Indian reality will shape our Theology and gradually lead to issue-oriented curriculum. Can we move towards an issue-based theological curriculum relevant to our context? This is possible only if the Church enters more and more into the history of our people, their struggles, agonies, hopes and aspirations for the fulness of life and communion. We should waste no time in perpetual cry for a relevant Indian Theology and start our committed insertion into the history of our people. If we do so, inculturation happens and indigenous theologies are generated. There will be little of abstract arm-chair talk of inculturation. This will also make demands of deeper and critical studies of our history and culture needed for a living theology for India.

As human beings, as christians and Indians, there is no pretext or excuse whatsoever to ignore the poor and the marginalised, a challenge to our humanity, to our Christian faith and to our Indianess. This is a great challenge to Theology for India. The poor of our country do not belong to the West nor to Latin America. They are the ravages of our sin and our sinful structures. The poor are a challenge to theology and to professional Theologians in India. Evangelical poverty and imposed poverty whose roots are national and global should enter into and shape our Theologising.

B) Pluralism in Theology

1. Pluralism is not a problem to a theological institution like

ours since we come from a tradition of pluralism of theologies. The problem comes from the quarters that is ignorant of such a tradition of pluralism. From the same quarters comes an affirmation of one Catholic theology for the whole church in and through a distorted meaning of "Catholic". If catholicity of faith is focused on catholicity of meaning of Christ for all, it affirms that all peoples can hear the Gospel in the very diversity of their cultures and histories (and not despite their cultures and histories). Indians as Indians and Africans as Africans (that is, human beings in history) can hear the Gospel and God's word in their own situation. The response of Indians as Indians to God's living word from within their culture and history creates its own 'indigenous' and Indian theology in its own mosaic of cultures. History of colonial conquest and its under-currents remain still powerful.

2. In our country majority of people follow Hinduism. Hinduism is very pluralistic in its theology. But within it, down the centuries, there has been a brahminical theology whose hegemony has been bolstered up by ideas of Varna and Karma. The protestant bhakti theism of the middle ages was domesticated and pigeonholed as a marga among margas by brahminism. This points to the ideological bias of such a theology. In Brahminism, the idea of Varnas and theory of Karma leading to castes and outcastes have become its ideologies. Therefore when we speak of pluralism of theologies based on pluralism of culture we must scrutinise as to whose theology it is and on whose culture it is based. We may legitimately ask if a theology is based on the culture of an oppressed people or on the culture of an oppressing group. This critical question we must raise about pluralism of theologies based on pluralism of cultures. While recognizing the legitimacy of pluralism of theologies based on pluralism of cultures. This applies to Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Islam as well as to Christianity. In our country, we suffer from a scotosis as to the ideological bias behind different theologies. Some stress dialogical theology based on religious pluralism as self-sufficient and adequate response to the total Indian reality while ignoring the vast human situation of unjust

poverty which questions the unconcern of elitist, sanskritist theology that belongs to the centre. We need a theology that is dialogical and liberative.

3. Traditional way of accommodating pluralism was formulated as follows: one faith and many expressions. In Lonergan's term, such a pluralism of theologies is called pluralism of communications. In our situation, it is no more adequate. The reality of many living faiths and emerging theology of religions that affirms God's providential ways of self-communication within the framework of different religions calls for not merely a pluralism of communications but a theology of dialogue, listening to God's word spoken to different peoples within their cultures and history, we discover a convergence while recognising specificities of the symbols of different faiths.

In our situation, unity of faith needs to be understood in a dynamic sense. While uniformity as an expression of controlling power from one outside centre is rejected, unity of faith shouldn't be confined to fossilized static statements and formulas. Faith concerns the living God. It is primarily life and deed. Our faith enters into dialogue with other faiths and thereby gets purified, deepened and enriched in so far it discovers the seeds of the Word and fruits of the Spirit in them while we too share the specifically unique message and experience of God in Jesus Christ regarding the total salvation of humankind. It is an opportunity for growth, dialogue and communal harmony.

4. We see the emerging pluralism of theologies behind different spiritualities. Social spirituality of liberative action and people's movements goes with a particular understanding of God, faith response, morality, sacramental celebration and therefore with a social theology. So too a dialogical ecumenical spirituality goes with a corresponding theology. The way different peoples respond to God in their own history and culture generates different Theologies. The spirituality of the oppressed dalits (Harijans) struggling for liberation and human dignity does generate its own theology, "Little traditions" of tribals and other small cultural

groups in their very smallness and often in situations of oppression have a spirituality and a theology of their own. This is a vast area of opportunity for a relevant theological research and response to our multi-religious Third World situation.

We reject liberal pluralism of convenience and expediency. We respect pluralism of theologies that respond to the pluralism of faiths and to the human situation of unjust poverty in its varied experience. Theological efforts in their very diversity which combine dialogue for liberation and liberation in dialogue hold rich promise in and for our pluralistic situation and for theological learning in our institute.

3. A Theology adapted to our Mission'

(J. Castellino, Rector, St. John's Seminary, Allahabad).

1) The Church in India has overemphasized the rationalistic approach. Our stress on doctrine, interpretation of Scripture and Tradition, using direct language has led the Church to an abstract theology. Because of its abstract speculation, it does not develop the experiential dimension of theology. Our whole system of theology provides plenty of answers but we are never sure of what the questions are. We only want to teach and save people from sin. So the end product of theology and mission of the Church has ended up in establishing institutions. This has not allowed us or rather it has blocked us from understanding the meaning of Revelation. We are therefore led to a cultural alienation. We think that we are faithful to God.

It is mainly the hierarchy who find their safety valves in traditional values of identity, orthodoxy, tradition, accuracy and continuity. Unless our Indian hierarchy realize its complacency of the system, there cannot be any change in the mission. The Bishops are not ready to take risks. Hence the Church in India is lethargic and maintains the status quo. It is by showing the irrelevance of our theological studies that we may be able to change this attitude of complacency. Patchwork changes in the theological

curriculum without a change of the system of formation will be of no avail.

2) The priorities we should have in our theological reflections are that: a) we should have a Christology that is suited to fulfil the mission of the Church in the Indian context; b) we should have a theology of non-christian religions which should lead the Indian Church to religious dialogue; c) we should integrate in our faith formation a theology of liberation.

Technically these are approaches to evangelization. Cultural and political (liberation) approaches have to be taken into serious consideration. Man's struggle in history, his cultural life can become meaningful only when we use inductive methodology and social analysis. This helps us to reflect on reality and to accept God's plan. It makes us accept pluralism. Christ becomes more incarnated. The Church becomes a model of servant, service, healing, herald, dialogue and sharing. God will be found in the history and social struggle of man, as we find him in Exodus. The Cross of Jesus becomes a reality not only on the vertical dimension but also on the horizontal.

The problem in our Indian seminaries is that the formators are not ready nor are they prepared for bringing about this change. We do not have a staff who are fully attuned to this contextualized theology.

3) As a small minority what can and should the Indian Church do to fulfil her evangelical mission in the socio-political context of India today? As a small minority the Church in India can and should fulfil her evangelical mission in the religio-social, economic and political contexts. A serious rethinking of the very concept of mission is necessary. This will mean that our involvement especially with other religions and in the struggles for justice and peace is called for.

The best and latest example we can think of is the Church in South Korea. The Catholics are only 5% in that

country but they boldly acted as a leaven to mould and transform the political system of the country. The Gospel values such as Truth, freedom and human rights and the adherence to these values have brought about a tremendous change in South Korea.

Hence in the seminaries and in formation houses there should be taught the political dimension of theology. In India we Christians live in the midst of 97% non-Christians. Our schools, hospitals and the many works of social service could very well be made use of to bring about this new consciousness of involvement not only in the political field or the liberation of man but also in the working together with other religious people with common concerns.

4) Are the arrangement and treatment of various topics in theological education in some way responsible for the anaemic and lethargic mood among the clergy and in the whole Indian Church? What can we do about it? It is not only the theological education that is responsible for the anaemia and lethargy in the clergy and the laity but it is the whole system of seminary formation which is responsible for it.

The Church should go for a deeper and an in-depth inculturation. The Church in India must be fully local and truly universal. Our seminary professors must be the masters of their cultural heritage. They must communicate in the language and thought patterns of the people. This challenge is missing in the clergy and therefore in the laity also. For example, in India we need not undertake a research study of Karl Rahner. That does not help us. Why do we still send our students to the European countries for higher studies? Without first knowing their own? That is how we keep perpetuating the alienation.

Our present system of seminary education makes us doctrine-centered, rationalistic, abstract, uninvolved, ritualistic, irrelevant and so on. We need therefore a re-thinking for the whole Church in India both for the clergy and the laity.

4. Updating of our Theology

(Paul Puthanangady, Director, NBCLC, Bangalore)

1. Immediate priorities in theological reflection

Theologizing differs from research and reflection in other areas of human behaviour and life. It is a prophetic action and hence there are certain requirements that are necessary in order to maintain this prophetic character of the theologian. In the first place, he must be one who has experienced the Word of God. Secondly, he must be fully involved in the life of the people. This means that he cannot do his reflections playing with abstract concepts alone. Thirdly, he must be rooted in the past. This means that he is the one through whom the God who spoke in history continues to speak today. Fourthly, he must be future-oriented in his theologizing, that is, he reflects with the goal towards which God is leading mankind and the universe, in front of Him. Finally, he must fulfil his mission constantly interpreting the signs of the time in the light of the Word of God irrespective of the consequences such interpretations can have for his life.

(i) If you look at the theological situation in India and analyse the ways in which theologizing is taking place in India we find that we are almost lacking in experience of the Word; our theologians may have the knowledge of the Word as interpreted and categorised by the western or Latin American theologians; even their original thinking is nothing else them a continuation of the intellectual exercise of the same western theologians. We, in India, really do not have or rarely have theologians who have experienced the Word in their lives, through their cultures, reflected and expressed them through their categories. This comes by a deep experience of the God who speaks to the prophet.

(ii) The involvement of our theologians in the struggles of the people is minimal. Our scholastic patrimony does not seem to have created a need for such involvement on the part of our theologians in this country. Our seminary professors are manualists and not pastors. They do not

have a knowledge of the people; but they can only impart knowledge to the people.

(iii) Our past is lying somewhere far away from our actual existence. We are carriers of an alienated christian tradition. Our experience of the past is borrowed from the experience of others. Therefore our respect for tradition is very superficial and even if we have it, it is more about the wars and evils that others inflicted on us in order to dominate us ecclesiastically and spiritually, rather than the experience of the risen Lord and of his saving presence in our history.

(iv) Our theologising is oriented more to the maintenance of the status quo rather than a launching into the future. As a consequence we have nothing to offer to the world in its onward march of response to the Lord of revelation.

(v) As a consequence we have become incapable of becoming interpreters of the signs of the time. We go through history without creating any movement. We just gloat through time and space and our christianity becomes visible in the immovable structures of our institutions. But the Church must be a *community*, not an institution.

How to remedy this situation. Our ministry of theologising should have certain characteristics which I would simply enumerate here. They are explained in the light of the above reflections.

1. Our theologians must be authentic men of God who have meditated on the Word before reflecting on them. Hence *God Experience*.

2. Our theologians must be real men of today, that is, capable of relating to the human community that is struggling in the world. Hence they must be men who have experienced humanity before reflecting upon them. Hence *Man Experience*.

3. Our theologians must be authentic men rooted in their culture. Their relationship with the human community should take them to their roots. Hence *Culturally Rooted*.

4. Our theologians must be men with a vision. They

should be able to go beyond the established formulas and communicate to the people the meaning of history as a forward movement. Hence *Men of Vision*.

(vi) Our theologians must be capable of interpreting the events of today in the light of God's Word. They should not limit themselves merely to an explanation or justification. Hence they must be men of courage, who can speak fearlessly in the face of the powerful ones of this world. They do not look for cheap popularity. Hence *Announcers of the Kingdom and Denouncers of Sin and Injustice*.

2. How to adjust the seminary curricula to make them relevant?

In order to have such a type of theologising, we need to prepare them adequately in our formation houses. Hence our formation houses should have certain characteristics: a) They should be houses of authentic God-experience. Never allow anyone to continue to be a priest whose God-experience is in doubt. We should really make sure that all our seminarians are given the opportunities and possibilities for such an experience. b) During the seminary training, there should be constant exposure to the actual life-situation of the people, even live-together in slums, villages and with factory workers. c) Great importance should be given to the study and appreciation of our cultural heritage and religious patrimony. These should not be merely studied as academic subjects, but as sources of authentic experience, which will reawaken in them a deep sense of belonging to the community and its history. d) New methods of evangelisation with a view to building up an authentic human community should be imparted. Today, by and large we are preparing pastors who can make people ready for heaven; but we have to make sure that we make them ready to face the challenges of an evolving society. e) We should free our seminarians from the temptation of careerism and promotion and cheap popularity. This means to create in them the readiness to commit themselves to the Gospel and the people to whom they have to preach the Gospel.

3. Church in the socio-political context of India today

She has to become more prophetic and less institutional. This would imply perhaps the following: a) She has to look at all the problems of our country as her own as evangeliser and as one who has received the mission from Christ. She should not distinguish religious problems from the socio-political situation. b) In evaluating a socio-political event she should be guided by the genuine demands of the Word, not by her petty institutional interests. c) She must understand that her genuineness is not established merely by orthodoxy of doctrines, but also and above all, in her capacity as witness, by her orthopraxy. d) She must realise that the socio-political situation is the ideal field of her evangelizing mission, inasmuch as Christ came to create an authentic human community and not merely to send people to heaven. e) She must realise that she can become truly like her Lord only by getting involved in the socio-political situation because only then will she be crucified. Crucifixion is a necessary condition for resurrection. f) Here in India the Gospel has failed to influence the socio-political situation because of her very heavy institutionalised life. She has to take up this as her priority and launch herself into it fearlessly.

4. Church's self-image in India today

a) She should be more like leaven than like a tree on which the birds come to rest. b) She should be more a spiritual power that attracts the Indian soul than the mighty structure that competes with the Indian body. c) She should be a prophetic community rather than a community that pretends to have all the truth and no error. d) Hence she should be a listening community more than a teaching community. e) She should be less and less Roman, Chaldean and Antiochian and more and more Indian in her life-style, worship forms, spiritual attitudes.

Then she will be recognizable and once this recognition takes place, she can be a community that can preach, teach, communicate and influence others. She will be then truly witnessing.

The Emerging Picture

Many of our respondents ask, "Have we not talked enough all these years about creating an indigenous and fully inculcuated Indian theology? Why not start doing something?" From the various responses presented above and many others which limitation of space did not allow us to include, a clear line of action has emerged. In fact such a line of procedure is actually imposed on us by the times and by our mission, and we have no choice except to accept it. The hierarchy which is said to look for "a safety valve in the traditional values of identity, orthodoxy, tradition, accuracy and continuity" should realize that a theology that does not respond to the social problems and basic concerns of the people today is a time-bomb which eventually will explode in its face bursting the credibility of the church.

1) Background of theologizing: Indian Church has come of age and it has to make itself fully Indian. Instead of living on borrowed ideas and donated resources Indian Church has to develop its own plans and programmes and depend upon its own resources. To reflect on the word of God in its full meaning it has to be experienced in the life of our people, their culture, poverty, traditional problems, struggles and concerns. Priests formed on the production line of the 'total communities' of our big seminaries by their training are suited only to be functionaries of an impersonal institution. Only real men of God who have experienced the word of God and met with God in the actual life of the people can be truly spiritual leaders of the people. Experiments like that of the M. P. Regional Seminary at Ashta and some others, where several small groups of seminarians live in the neighbouring villages and come to the seminary as day-scholars to attend the lectures and have the major portion of their personal formation in the context of the village, may be considered developments in the right direction.

2) Reorientation of theology: The theological treatises taught in the seminaries still seem to try to keep up the idea that theology is 'the science of God' and hence they have to find out directly what God is in himself and how

the other mysteries like the Incarnation, Redemption, Church, Grace and Sacraments are related to the one divine mystery. Instead they have to concentrate on the meaning of God for man: Here man is the focus of theology. This humanization of theology stressed by Aquinas has to be completed and consciously accepted.

3) The principal concern of theology is no more preserving and defending the traditional Christian doctrine. The age of heresies and controversies is over. The task of theology is to make the teaching of Christ relevant to the life of the people, and continue the work he initiated, namely, transforming the world into the Father's Kingdom. The primacy of praxis over theory is not something invented by Karl Marx, but is the central orientation of the Gospel. Hence instead of a treatise-oriented theology we need an issue-oriented theological curriculum in our seminaries, theology that will focus attention on the great deeds of God for human salvation that form the model for our action for the total liberation of Man.

4) Reintegration of theological studies: The reorientation of theology demands a reintegration of the four departments of theological studies, Scripture, history, systematics and pastorals. With the preoccupation of theology to find out what God is in himself, Scripture tried to learn through scientific means what each one of the Biblical writers actually meant. History tried to discuss impartially what the different issues in the various ecclesial conflicts and controversies were and to see who was right and who was wrong. Pastorals aimed at formulating guidelines for Christian life and techniques for the direction of the faithful. But if the scope of theology is to understand what God is telling man about man today, the principal concern of Scriptural studies should be to make the different books of the Bible contemporary texts for the modern man. History should disclose the particular point of divine revelation and the special aspect of human life each church and group and individual writers wanted to bring out in spite of the clash of opinions and misunderstandings. The purpose of history is not to curse our past and parcel out blame but to bless

our future showing us how to learn from the past. The history of religions should show what aspect of our common faith each religion tries to emphasize. Pastors should proclaim the unique moral message of Christianity and the special mission of the church today. All the different departments of theological studies should provide a unified message and a total vision.

5) Pluralism: Pluralism is the characteristic note of this new orientation of theology. It is not merely "the pluralism of communications" of the one faith in the "truths" revealed by God once upon a time. If faith is the loyalty to the mission received from the Word-made-flesh, it has to follow the evolution of that mission in the concrete history of the different churches, and the historical expressions of the same faith in God found in the different religious traditions. Since errors are negations and can subsist only on account of the elements of truth captivated in them, once the positive expressions of truth are recognized falsehood will fall off by itself. Pluralism arises also from the variety of means available to man to realize and express his faith. As Battista Mondin says, "Reason (*ratio*) during its apex in the classical and patristic ages meant philosophy; in modern times with the discovery of science, reason was identified more and more with empirical science; and during the twentieth century with the development of human sciences, reason is identified with any sort of scientific research done with objectivity and rigor... In contemporary theology faith has become a dimension of the whole person, who through the gift of faith lives in confidence and obedience to God."¹ So the pluralism of sciences and cultures themselves create a pluralism of theology. This pluralism to be effective and meaningful should become a pluralism of spiritualities, to gear man to the accomplishment of his mission in the diversity of situations in which he has to live his faith.

6) Christian theology should not only be contextualized and

1. "Faith and Reason in Roman Catholic Thought from Clement of Alexandria to Vatican II", *Dialgue and Alliance I* (1987), 18-26.

action oriented, but it should also be future oriented. With a vision that interprets the signs of the times theology should give leadership to the nation providing creative ideas that will enable people to resolve problems intelligently and build up fellowship of people transcending caste and culture, religion and politics. So if we wish to make our future priests real leaders of the people they should be men of original ideas with a creative imagination and for this their studies have to be made more demanding than in other academic studies, with greater involvement in field work. The Church should not remain a minority institution keeping itself on the sidelines of public life, but should get involved in all aspects of people's life providing a model of participatory democracy not only in electing public officials but also in making them work for the good of the people. Only against the background of this common struggle for justice and for the liberation of the whole man can our efforts for the salvation of his soul have credibility.

J. B. Chethimattam

Indic Theological Series

Introduction

After 20 centuries of christian reflection, mainly from the mediterranean perspective and in a western cultural (not strictly geographical) context, a new venture emerges from an indic viewpoint and context. We say indic and not indian so as to include the entire subcontinent and not to identify ourselves with any nation-state, ideology, or *status quo*. After two millennia of a judeo-christian tradition could there not be place for an indic-christian reflection? This venture would not be possible without the forerunners who since the very beginning of the christian tradition have experienced the mystical core of that tradition and have struggled to live their own christian identity within parameters not reducible to those of the abrahamic phylum. Moreover, since decades there have been many publications in this direction, for the need of new theological insights is felt everywhere. We would like to offer a forum for reflection on, discussion about, and systematic approach to the complex issues of a living theology for our times.

At the present moment of history this venture, certainly, should not — and actually cannot — bypass the fact that christianity has been shaped by an accumulated tradition of twenty centuries of christian history, two more millennia of jewish tradition and even beyond.

We do not understand christic identity in a sectarian way. We know that our roots penetrate deep down into the cosmic *humus*, the human soil. Pope John Paul II put it clearly in his historic visit to the Sinagogue of Rome on the 13th April 1986: 'The Jewish religion is not 'extrinsic'

to us, but in a certain way is 'intrinsic' to our religion" (Cf. *Information Service*, Nr. 60 (1986, I-II) p. 27 of *The Secretariate for Promoting Christian Unity*. Vatican City). We are conscious of the riches and challenges of history. Yet, in the present world-situation we can no longer accept the ideology of one single tradition as the universal paradigm of culture. In spite of the neo-colonialistic mentality represented by the technocratic civilization, the peoples of the earth today become more and more conscious of the need to overcome any one single pattern of culture and the necessity of a healthy pluralism if humankind has to survive.

Now, religion is not independent of culture. Religion gives culture its ultimate contents, but culture gives religion its language. In a word, could we not find an *intrinsic* link also between christian faith and other religions?

The indic situation is in this sense privileged. It benefits by most of the religions of the world. This fact is theologically relevant and challenges the ways in which christian theology, at least after the sixteenth century, has generally proceeded. The christic self-understanding, and praxis, today cannot ignore this fact. South Asia is also privileged to have the three main streams of the christian tradition, the protestant, the catholic and the orthodox. We should stress here the latter which in its chaldaic roots stands closer to the Jesus of history than any one else, and which since apostolic times share in the destiny of the indic peoples. We could say, following a vedic and a biblical metaphor, that it is now our duty to take initiative to weave a garment of many colors.

It is not enough for the millions of christians living in Asia, Africa and Oceania to criticise traditional theology past or present and plead for a more fruitful adaptation to the conditions of those peoples and cultures. The task is much more radical. It has to be a thorough rethinking of the human situation. Ultimately it is not a question of inculturation, but of incarnation.

We are aware of an excruciating dilemma. Either christianity remains as it is, or it accepts the possibility of a mutation at the threshold of its third millennium, brought about by the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Oceania. In the first case, it may develop its potentialities and may interact with other cultural and religious traditions while conserving its identity by differentiation. In fact, this is what happened, especially since the time of the european expansion four centuries ago. Christianity is then synonymous with its past and, while allowing for a certain growth, remains tied to one particular culture and world-view. It may not be just political christendom, but it is doctrinal christianity.

In the second case the new step could be named *christianness*. It does not deny its past but is aware of an incoming new situation. The christic fact can no longer claim the power to be leaven if it remains identified with one single *idiom* (in the technical sense of the word), with one single cultural world,

There seems to be an emerging consensus that human kind is entering a new era. This fact cannot be irrelevant to christians. Many of the contemporary christians feel equally committed to their respective non-christian traditions as they are to christianity. They would like to be equally loyal to the traditions of their countrymen and eventually of their ancestors as they are to the christian heritage. They feel that 'inculturation' by borrowing from other religions may be a partial move or a strategic step but ultimately not convincing. Culture is not just the outer garb of religion; it is its body, and one does not borrow an alien body. Adaptation of surrounding features is a well-known sociological phenomenon, but faith is something more than a sociological fact; it belongs to another sphere. We are not the judges of history nor can we delete the pages of the past. Our karma is both abrahamic and indic. but it is something new at the same time which does not need to justify the horrors committed in the sacred names of religion and dharma among other names.

We need to be open to our surroundings. The present writer wrote already in 1953 for the European world and rewrote it in 1958 for the indic context: 'A theology deaf to the environment where it has to live would become very soon also dumb for that milieu. "Verbum Dei non est alligatum", says St. Paul. The word of God, theo-logy, cannot be tied to any particular class, world, and culture. An isolated and chemically pure theology for fear of contamination — as the Jews who crucified Christ, refused to enter the palace of the gentile Pilate — would remain to say the least, barren and ineffective.'

The *Indic Theological Series* comes out of an awareness that the human need of the hour is not just one of updating one's religion, reforming some beliefs, and learning from the others. All this is imperative, but is not sufficient. What the world needs today, in this field, is a much more radical attitude in view of the over-all human predicament and in the light of one's own faith.

We need not now describe the complex situation of South Asia, a universe in itself, which is, however, reflecting a situation of three quarters of the world (the "two-thirds world"!) which include also the marginalized people of the industrialized and 'rich' countries. But once again, unless we fall a victim to the powers that be, which welcome elitistic ivory-tower investigations and even merely academic criticisms, we should incorporate the, by now, famous "option for the poor" into the very core of our enterprise. When the 'tyrant' is not a person, but a system, the situation is much more complicated. Humankind finds itself today in a situation which requires a fundamental reflection and calls for a new awareness and praxis. We detect at least four specific features of our times:

a) a technocratic civilization spreading all over the world (Man-made injustices: *Theologies of Liberation*),

b) a physical-ecological awareness of planetarian existence (Human-cosmic solidarity, felt but threatened: *Eco-Theology*).

c) the real possibility and even danger of an atomic terricide and genetic homicide (a mutation of Man: *Theology of History and Technocracy*), and

d) the need for interaction and mutual fecundation among the living traditions of the world (consciousness that none is self-sufficient: *Theology of Religions and World-myths*).

The Indic Theological Series would like to contribute to the clarification of these overwhelming problems from the specific viewpoint of South Asia. We do not assume *a priori* that we know what is theology, nor have a fixed notion of christian theology. These very questions belong to our Series.

We feel that this new situation presents a challenge to christians, and mainly to theologians. It demands action as much as reflection. We could call this situation *the challenge of Peace*. Peace seems to be the new emerging unifying myth for the peoples of the Earth. Peace is here understood as the synthesis (not a system) of Justice, Freedom and Harmony — and presents obviously the polysemic character of any living myth.

In trying to meet this challenge we are aware of the following assumptions among others:

a) The indic subcontinent is a depositary of millennial and variegated cultures which constitute the subsoil for our thinking and primordial attitudes. To ignore this fact may prove more lethal today than it has been in the past. *Ecclesia ab Abel*, said the Patristic tradition. Christianity *apauruṣeya* could be an indic rendering — without, for that matter, standing only for the sanskritistic culture.

b) The experience of Christ has been central to our lives and Christ remains a fundamental symbol. ‘Jesus is the Christ’ is the christian *mahāvākyā*. But the reality of Christ is not exhausted in historicity or in Jesus,

c) The polyvalent christian tradition and the polysemic traditions of the indic subcontinent meet in us also with

the polymorphic fact which we call modernity. Our endeavour is not anachronic or merely historical, nor do we stand *a priori* for apologetics of any sort. We do not neglect the past, we are concerned with the future, but we are obsessed by neither. We are rooted in the temporal experience of the present — in time, not just of time.

We are at the cross-roads of these three movements and would like to integrate them in our endeavours.

More may not be said at the outset. The authors of the Series are free to express their views and we do not claim to speak in the name of any organisation. The problems are too fundamental and often too risky to claim authority. The monographs offer lines of research, problems to meditate upon, suggestions to try, ideas to improve, avenues of action. Some may consider that Christendom is over and Christianity evolving into Christianness. Some may consider the Christ-symbol valid outside the abrahamic religions and the mediterranean world. Others may prefer to delve into the mystery of Christ in history and offer thus a contribution to human salvation. Others may feel the need for a mutual fecundation among religions, and the like. All of us are keen in offering the fruits of our experiences and reflections for the sake of Truth, Justice, Peace. Thus, liberation from error, injustice, exploitation, in a word, sin, is central to our concerns.

Having stressed individual freedom and responsibility the *Indic Theological Series* would like to emphasize equally the ecclesial character of this enterprise. Ecclesial here does not mean a particular church-affiliation. It means community, *sangha*. But it means more than just a society of scholars or a group of people of good will. It means an actual community of people imbued with the same ideals, although perhaps with different ideas, coming together with concurrent aims, although from different ways, struggling with similar problems, although by different means, and united in the same bond of fellowship and concern, although from diverse backgrounds and persua-

sions. The nucleus of this community is the *Indian Theological Association* which sponsors the Series. The initiative comes from members of the Roman Catholic Church in India striving to widen without diluting the very meaning of catholicity, but it is not restricted only to catholics or even christians. From the very first 'Pope' we learn that God does not discriminate between persons.

We claim obedience to the Spirit and fidelity to our convictions, we even believe that a christic impulse is alive within us, but we do not pretend to be teachers. We offer our reflections for stimulation, perhaps inspiration, and certainly correction.

For comments, criticism and collaboration, please write to the General Editor, Theology Centre, Kottayam, 686 017.

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